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CHURCH, COMMUNITY, AND STATE

Volume IV

CHRISTIAN FAITH AND THE COMMON LIFE

THE CHURCHES SURVEY THEIR TASK: The Report of the Conference at Oxford, July 1937, on Church, Community, and State

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CHRISTIAN FAITH AND THE COMMON LIFE

by

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

FEW will question the significance of the issues which engaged the attention of the conference on Church, Community, and State held at Oxford in July 1937. More important than the conference itself is the continuing process, in which the conference was not more than an incident, of an attempt on the part of the Christian Churches collectively—without, up to the present, the official participation of the Church of Rome, but not without the unofficial help of some of its thinkers and scholars[1]—to understand the true nature of the vital conflict between the Christian faith and the secular and pagan tendencies of our time, and to see more clearly the responsibilities of the Church in relation to the struggle. What is at stake is the future of Christianity. The Christian foundations of western civilization have in some places been swept away and are everywhere being undermined. The struggle to-day concerns those common assumptions regarding the meaning of life without which, in some form, no society can cohere. These vast issues are focussed in the relation of the Church to the State and to the community, because the non-Christian forces of to-day are tending more and more to find embodiment in an all-powerful State, which is committed to a particular philosophy of life and seeking to organize the whole of life in accordance with a particular doctrine of the end of man's existence, and in an all-embracing community life which claims to be at once the source and the goal of all human activities: a State, that is to say, which aims at being also a Church.

[1] A volume of papers by Roman Catholic writers dealing with subjects closely akin to the Oxford Conference and stimulated in part by the preparatory work for Oxford will be published shortly under the title *Die Kirche Christi: ihre heilende, gestaltende und ordnende Kraft für den Menschen und seine Welt.*

To aid in the understanding of these issues the attempt was made in preparation for the conference at Oxford to enlist as many as possible of the ablest minds in different countries in a common effort to think out some of the major questions connected with the theme of the conference. During the three years preceding the conference studies were undertaken wider in their range and more thorough in their methods than any previous effort of a similar kind on the part of the Christian Churches. This was made possible by the fact that the Universal Christian Council for Life and Work, under whose auspices the conference was held, possessed a Department of Research at Geneva with two full-time directors and was also able, in view of the conference, to establish an office in London with two full-time workers and to set up an effective agency for the work of research in America. There was thus provided the means of circulating in mimeographed form (in many instances in three languages) a large number of papers for comment, of carrying on an extensive and continuous correspondence, and of maintaining close personal touch with many leading thinkers and scholars in different countries.

Intensive study over a period of three years was devoted to nine main subjects. The results of this study are embodied in the six volumes to which this general introduction relates and in two others. The plan and contents of each, and most of the papers, were discussed in at least two or three small international conferences or groups. The contributions were circulated in first draft to a number of critics in different countries and comments were received often from as many as thirty or forty persons. Nearly all the papers were revised, and in some instances entirely rewritten, in the light of these criticisms.

Both the range of the contributions and the fact that

the papers have taken their present shape as the result of a wide international interchange of ideas give these books an oecumenical character which marks a new approach to the subjects with which they deal. They thus provide an opportunity such as has hardly existed before for the study in an oecumenical context of some of the grave and pressing problems which to-day concern the Christian Church throughout the world.

The nine subjects to which preparatory study was devoted were the following:

1. The Christian Understanding of Man.
2. The Kingdom of God and History.
3. The Christian Faith and the Common Life.
4. The Church and its Function in Society.
5. Church and Community.
6. Church and State.
7. Church, Community and State in Relation to the Economic Order.
8. Church, Community and State in Relation to Education.
9. The Universal Church and the World of Nations.

The last six of these subjects were considered at the Oxford Conference, and the reports prepared by the sections into which the conference was divided will be found in the official report of the conference entitled *The Churches Survey Their Task* (Allen and Unwin, 5s.).

A volume on *The Church and its Function in Society*, by Dr. W. A. Visser 't Hooft and Dr. J. H. Oldham (Allen and Unwin, 8s. 6d.), was published prior to the conference.

Three of the volumes in the present series of six have to do with the first three subjects in the list already given. These are fundamental issues which underlie the study

of all the other subjects. The titles of these volumes are:

The Christian Understanding of Man.
The Kingdom of God and History.
The Christian Faith and the Common Life.

The remaining three volumes in the series are a contribution to the study of three of the main subjects considered by the Oxford Conference. These are:

Church and Community.
Church, Community and State in Relation to Education.
The Universal Church and the World of Nations.

The subject of Church and State is treated in a book by Mr. Nils Ehrenström, one of the directors of the Research Department. This has been written in the light of discussions in several international conferences and groups and of a wide survey of the relevant literature, and has been published under the title *Christian Faith and the Modern State* (Student Christian Movement, 6s.).

The planning and shaping of the volume is to a large extent the work of the directors of the Research Department, Dr. Hans Schönfeld and Mr. Nils Ehrenström. The editorial work and the preparation of the volumes for the press owes everything to the continuous labour of Miss Olive Wyon, who has also undertaken or revised the numerous translations, and in the final stages to the Rev. E. S. Shillito, who during the last weeks accepted the responsibility of seeing the books through the press. Valuable help and advice was also given throughout the undertaking by Professor H. P. Van Dusen and Professor John Bennett of America.

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INTRODUCTION

by

NILS EHRENSTRÖM

INTRODUCTION

THE subject of this volume has become so urgent at the present time that it claims the closest attention from all who are concerned with the deeper issues of human existence. The reasons for this fact need only be briefly indicated since they are already well known.

In this difficult and perilous phase of world history, usually described by journalists as an "age of transition," many people are anxiously wondering whether humanity will succeed in establishing a certain balance and order in human affairs, and a tolerable condition of well-being, or whether the future will lead mankind through a dark valley of catastrophe, the consequences of which might far exceed the darkest forebodings of the most convinced pessimist. The physicians who are feeling the pulse of our present civilization pronounce their diagnosis in terms of threatening disintegration and impending catastrophe. Even if this pessimistic diagnosis may be slightly overdone it would be a sign of unpardonable blindness to deny the gravity of the situation. Humanity has been loosed from its moorings and seems to be driven forward by the Furies of uncertainty and futility over an unknown ocean to an unknown destination The new discoveries of science and psychology, the amazing mastery over the forces of nature, which gave man the feeling that he had mastered the earth have set forces in motion which have gradually grown beyond man's power of control, and have made him the slave of his own discoveries. The release from moral and religious bonds, the dissolution of the stable structure of custom and tradition, which accompanied this development and at first was acclaimed as the victory of the autonomous man, has increasingly produced a spirit of bewilderment and anxiety which leads to a feverish

chase after new ideals, and indeed after more than ideals, namely, a reality and community which overcomes the terrible demonic spell of isolation, and after new idols which are worthy of man's worship and devotion. In totalitarian mass movements, which provide new centres of integration in a world of disruption, and claim, and to some extent receive, unconditional obedience, man seeks for that wholeness and harmony in the common order for which he craves, and an all-inclusive philosophy which gives significance to the problems and pursuits of daily life. Class, nation, state, or a particular type of civilization have been turned into absolutes, and have become secular saviours, inspiring hope and confidence, and often a willingness for sacrifice and the service of the community which seem to give the lie to all prophecies of impending catastrophe. But whatever the merits and demerits of these attempts to give new significance and integration to the life of man may be in other respects, the very fact that they are rooted in a particular section of life results in fresh divisions and conflicts, only on a more gigantic scale. Part of the tragedy of the present situation, for instance, lies in the fact that the increase in international communications and the creation of new methods of rapid transport of people, ideas, and goods has made the earth apparently too small for these competing ideologies and communities; instead of promoting peace and friendly exchange they seem to pile up and increase embittered conflicts. In view of this situation if anyone were still so blind as to be willing to sing the praises of this "best of all possible worlds" he would be silenced by the "wars and rumours of war" which threaten to break humanity into atoms. Economic insecurity, social injustice, political oppression and spiritual bewilderment and dissatisfaction are overshadowed by the sense of international insecurity. Thus it is not surprising that many sorely tortured hearts

are asking: Is there any deliverance from this nightmare?

There is one feature in this situation which sometimes escapes the observer, which, however, is of supreme importance for every participant in this struggle who professes supreme loyalty to Christ. The common life of mankind is increasingly being built upon a post-Christian basis; it is leaving Christianity behind it. This applies of course primarily to the West; but the actual repercussions of Christian influence in those parts of the world where the Church is a small minority, justify the assertion that even there the general ideas and forces governing the common life have a post-Christian character. For a long time the Church and the forces of modernity have lived together comparatively peacefully, a fact which is probably at least to some extent explained by the fact of the widespread mutual interpenetration which has been going on for so many centuries. The long Christian tradition in the Western world has not been without its influence. It has exercised a formative and directive influence which extended and still extends far beyond the boundaries of the Church proper. A common civilization, largely inspired by the Christian religion, was faithfully handed down from one generation to another. But now the steady but largely unconscious drift away from Christianity which went on under the mask of tolerance and indifference has in conspicuous instances become conscious of its hostility to Christianity. Motives and ideals, which either sprang directly from Christian sources or had an affinity with it, have become independent, have gained a momentum and energy of their own, and are now deliberately turning against their origin The significance of this emergence of a post-Christian society cannot be over-estimated. The problems which it raises for the Church are very different—and far more difficult—from

those arising out of its encounter with the pagan world in the early stages of its history. Not only does this drift away from Christianity create a peculiar immunity against the Christian message; a post-Christian civilization which becomes conscious of its own powers and possibilities soon adopts an anti-Christian attitude; it seems to be forced to develop its own gospel of salvation, its own forms of worship, its own dogma and ethos, in opposition to, but also often in an extraordinary similarity to the Church. It becomes arrogant, intolerant, hypersensitive about everything which recalls the rejected Christian heritage, a phenomenon which witnesses to a secret feeling of its debt of unacknowledged gratitude to the Church, which leads it to irrational and inexplicable outbursts of hostility and persecution. This fact bears out the truth of the saying that no one is more arrogant and fanatical than the renegade. These new man-made faiths, whether their political home be dictatorship or democracy or anything else, with their professed claim or unconscious tendency to determine and to mould the whole of man's life, present a formidable challenge and a supreme opportunity to the Church. They promise to give that which the Church to a large extent had forgotten to give, namely, a wholeness of being in which a glowing faith and a glorious vision of things to come are not separated from but shape the day-to-day activities of the community. And we begin to perceive what the emergence of this post-Christian society means for the Church. It is confronted by the alternatives: either to conform to the spirit of the age and serve honourably as a moral tonic, or to find itself thrown into the ghetto of obscurity or persecution. There are, however, hopeful signs which show that the Church is alive to a third alternative!

A further reason for the prominence of this subject in present-day Christianity is the slow but steady re-

discovery of the Church's own responsibility for the common life of man. It is scarcely necessary to dwell on this point; this whole oecumenical enterprise—of which the Oxford Conference on Church, Community and State was an important milestone—constitutes one of the most striking manifestations of this re-discovery. Troeltsch's monumental work on the *Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, and many later books by other scholars, have shown in an impressive manner how all down the centuries the Church has been aware of this task, and also that it has actually exercised a great and formative influence upon society. Generation after generation has grappled with the task, in the light of its own understanding of the will of God and the requirements of the situation. The records reveal wonderful achievements but also humiliating shortcomings and errors. But one of the most striking lessons of this long history of social Christianity, at least when one surveys it as a whole, is the correlation between periods of living missionary faith and periods of enhanced social concern. Perhaps one might be justified in considering the sustained and manifold efforts to bring the Christian faith to bear upon the great social issues of the day, and to give guidance and light to a baffled world, as one sign among others that even to-day the Spirit of God is operating mightily in the hearts of men, desiring to lead the Church into a wider and deeper realization of its mission in the common life of humanity.

But no one would be more ready to acknowledge, than those individuals and groups within the Church who bear this concern most deeply within their hearts, that this rekindled sense of responsibility for the right ordering of human society has not yet brought about a clear understanding of its distinctively Christian character, its guiding principles and proper modes of expression. Over against a prevailing tendency to minimize the importance of true

doctrine and clear thinking on these questions the conviction is, however, increasingly gaining ground that such clarity is imperative, not as a substitute for or an "escape-mechanism" from, courageous intervention in the conflicts of a world in agony, but on the contrary as a necessary expression of a living "faith which worketh through love." Even if perhaps in a past epoch the Church fulfilled a true service in proclaiming the necessity for "the application of religious and moral standards" in face of the prevailing a-moralism in economics, politics, etc., this attitude is certainly no longer adequate. Almost daily we are reminded that the world does not need this service; it has its own religions and its own moralities in which the organic connexion between ultimate convictions and all the perplexing problems of the individual and the corporate life are often worked out with much greater consistency and force than in contemporary Christianity. Faith is set against faith; ethos against ethos. The universal struggle for daily bread, social justice and international peace, the new philosophies of life and mass movements which sway the hearts of millions at the present time, driving them alternately to despair and to self-glorification, must therefore be regarded by the Church as an opportunity granted her by God to proclaim the will of God for human life with greater earnestness and eagerness, and to demonstrate in her *own* life what God wills for human society. In this situation it is imperative for the Church to gain a clearer sense of the meaning of her own ethos, its central affirmations, main criteria, and its practical implications, both for the ordinary pursuits of daily life and for the exercise of Christian responsibility towards the larger issues of a changing society.

The present symposium is an oecumenical contribution to these efforts to re-discover and re-state what the Christion faith means for the infinite variety of callings, actions,

and decisions in man's common life. The contributors were asked to deal primarily with the foundations of Christian conduct in the structural framework of society, but at the same time, to illustrate their position by reference to concrete questions. Thus, for instance, Dr. Temple and Professor Farmer relate their views to the question of peace and war, while Dr. Wiesner mainly deals with the Christian doctrine of law. The writers—representing very different traditions and schools of thought—have tried, as far as possible, within the limits of space at their disposal, to expound their own convictions on the questions they discuss. The reader will soon become aware of the great, and to some extent irreconcilable, differences which emerge in these papers; they reflect the tragic divisions in the Body of Christ which also exist in the social realm, divergencies which are not only conditioned by legitimate differences of judgment on the actual situation and its demands, but also by the central convictions of faith. Professor Niebuhr's criticisms of certain theological tendencies on the Continent of Europe, and Dr. Wiesner's attempt to show the radical opposition between the Biblical conception of human society and any doctrine of Natural Law, are signs of the great gulf which separates sincere Christians in this field as well as in others. But it is impossible to discover what the authentic Christian ethos is and what it means for the present world by concealing these divisions; it can only be done by an honest facing of facts and by bringing all these difficulties out into the open. Under the surface, however, there is a greater measure of agreement in this volume than might possibly appear at a first reading. Many apparent contradictions are simply due to differences in habits of thought and consequent ways of expression, and disappear as soon as one enters more deeply into the leading ideas and convictions which lie behind them. Others again

originate in differences of approach and emphasis, due to the diversity of historical and personal background, and do not necessarily imply mutually exclusive views but rather are complementary interpretations of the same living reality. But even after all these elements have been taken into account the fact remains that it is precisely the general revival of a social consciousness amongst Christians which has revealed how greatly they are divided in this field also, and, as a result of the increased sense of the significance of these issues, has led to new and serious dissensions.

There is, however—as evidenced by the papers collected in this volume and other recent publications on the subject—a distinct movement of convergence in present-day Christianity on these questions, perhaps not so much in the realm of solutions as in understanding where the real issues lie. The comprehensive process of thought on these matters which is not only proceeding within the individual Churches but on a world-wide scale as well, is gradually crystallizing round certain central issues which may well prove to be indications of the line to be followed by further Christian endeavour in this field.

The contributors to the present volume, for instance, have had such questions as the following in their minds, when preparing their papers. How far are the various spheres of the common life, like the family, economics, the state and the world order, to be regarded as manifestations of the will of God? Has God a purpose for the ordering of these spheres as well as for the action of Christians in these spheres? Is a distinctively Christian judgment on the structure of society possible, or does this apply only to the motives of persons acting within this structure? If God has a purpose for the ordering of the common life, what are the sources and grounds of the Christian's knowledge of that purpose, and in what respects does the Christian differ from the non-Christian in his under-

standing of this purpose? Has the Church as a corporate body a specific capacity for understanding and interpreting God's purpose for society? How far are human existence and behaviour conditioned by sub-personal factors, and how far are these factors controllable by human thought and will? Are the various spheres of human life in society subject to relatively independent and diverse laws of their own, and if so, what is the nature and what are the limits of that autonomy? May there be a difference in the will of God for a Christian concerning his action as a private person and his action in his official and public capacity? Can the Christian commandment of love be realized in all spheres of life? If not, what are the limits of such realization and what alternative principles are applicable and binding (e.g. justice and loyalty)?

Some observations regarding the papers in this volume may be added on a subject of crucial importance, which is central to all the subjects discussed, namely, the relation between the Church and the world.

It has been said that the question of the Church is the great unsolved problem of Protestantism; and many members of other communions would probably agree with this statement. The newly awakened consciousness of the central significance of the Church as the Body of Christ, as the society of the redeemed, is therefore undoubtedly one of the most noteworthy tendencies of the present day. The Church of Christ is the community where the Christian ethos is given by God and lived out in practice as an actual reality. The Church and the world, in their contradistinction and correlation, is the proper frame of reference for the understanding of what the Christian faith means for the common life. This assertion which would probably be generally accepted although rather differently interpreted, is indeed of great revolutionary significance. It means the rejection of a whole series of

"isms" which have done so much to falsify Christian teaching and practice on this matter and it gives to the Christian ethos a depth and richness which to a large extent it had lost. The Christian ethos springs out of the very heart of Christianity, the belief in the existence of a new creation which God in His mercy has set in the midst of the world, a God-centred and God-directed common life in which the self-centredness of isolation is overcome by the intervention of God Himself. As Professor Dibelius reminds us in his paper, the joyful proclamation of this new creation which breaks into the age that is passing away and victoriously conquers it, stands in the foreground of the message of the New Testament, and this belief is a fundamental *motif* in the other papers in this book, although expressed with certain differences of emphasis.

What has already been said above about the Church as the "unsolved problem of Christianity" could with equal right be applied to the problem of the *world*. The disastrous effect of the ancient confusion between the "world" as denoting the common life of mankind with all its institutions, pursuits and activities, and as the reign of evil, is well known. The opposition between the Church and the world in the former sense, and the subsequent attempts to combine them into a workable harmony, has led to all the false and unfortunate antitheses which have so greatly weakened the influence of the Church in the whole range of the social life of mankind. At the present time, however, we are undoubtedly gaining a new understanding of the fact that the true antithesis consists in the opposition between the Church of Christ and the counter-Church of evil—it also being divided into many denominations and communions, but growingly conscious of its oneness in opposition to the true Church. This distinction puts the common life in a wholly new

perspective; it cuts across all the current distinctions between the personal and the impersonal, the natural and the supernatural, the spiritual and the temporal, and marks an invisible frontier *within* the various spheres of life. The true line of demarcation, for instance, is not to be drawn between religion and politics, Church and State, but between a political life "in Christ"—and thus restored to its God-given function—and a political life which has its integrating centre in some mere segment of human existence, which consequently, instead of checking the fundamental disorder in the world, simply perpetuates it.

This view of the common life as the battlefield of the Church and its counter-Church means a radical rejection of that individualism, spiritualism and departmentalism which for so long dominated Christian thought and practice. The Church cannot be confined to the relation of a man to his Maker—a restriction which Dr. Temple rightly rejects in his paper as incompatible with Christianity—or to the relations between one person and another, it also means a redemptive life which leavens the institutional framework of society, and man's relations to the material world. Emphasizing the fact that Christianity must be understood primarily in terms of persons, Professor Farmer points out that there is a "thing" side to persons, and furthermore that "men exist and are related to one another not only as individuals but also as groups and through their responsibilities for and to groups." Dr. Weisner is probably right when, though with some overstatement, he draws attention to the fact that within oecumenical Christianity Continental, and particularly Lutheran, Protestantism tends to lay the main emphasis upon the question of personal ethics and to take the social structure for granted or to regard it as morally irrelevant, whereas Anglo-Saxon Christianity, largely inspired by Calvinism, con-

centrates attention on society. But whatever these actual differences in emphasis may be, this new perception of the variety of the ethical relations of man confronts the Church with problems which still have to be solved. Over against contemporary tendencies in all spheres of life to subordinate the personal to the impersonal, the Church can never cease to proclaim that in God's creation there is a definite, irrevocable *ordre de grandeur* between personal, institutional, and material realities. A realistic estimate of this interdependence between these, implying a clearer understanding of the instrumental or functional character of the last two, belongs undoubtedly to the great tasks by means of which the Church, through its members, may be able to exercise a decisive influence upon the shaping of society. Thus, for example, the existence of terrible human poverty, and even famine, in the midst of potential plenty, and the misuse which this implies of the material and technical resources of the earth, represents a moral responsibility of the first magnitude.

The Church stands for the *instauratio omnium in Christo*, not only of persons but of all functions, forces, and activities in human life, and everywhere it has to fight God's battles. What this implies concretely is well brought out in the analysis of the complex and multi-dimensional nature of social evil which Professor Niebuhr and Professor Bennett give in their papers. Evil is not only the sinful rebellion of man against God and his isolation from his fellowmen; it brings in its train widespread disintegration of human life which works itself out in the social order in various ways and incorporates itself in social maladjustments, in false philosophies of life, in values and systems. Human society is enmeshed in a network of evil in which even the best intentions are tragically interwoven. But in that which is usually called social evil other factors also are present which must be taken into consideration: the

size and complexity of modern social problems, the "lags" in social development, exaggerated specialization and the inescapable limits of attention and imagination. Any attempt to come to grips with the social responsibility of the Church without taking into account the complexity of these matters, Professor Bennett insists, "obscures the necessity of a multiple attack upon our social problems—an attack along religious and moral, educational and technical, political and social lines at the same time."

At a time where the counter-Church claims the whole of man's life it is a vital concern for the Church to gain a new sense of its nature as a new creation and of its unique mission in the common life of man as a whole. In so doing, it does not claim to "build" the Kingdom of God. "Our task," as Dr. Temple observes, "is not to construct the Kingdom, but to live in the conditions of this world as those who by the grace of God, through the redemption effected in Christ, are citizens of the Kingdom." God will consummate His glorious Kingdom in His own time. Ours is the privilege and costly responsibility of proclaiming throughout the whole range of life that this new heaven and new earth is the only hope for a sinful and disheartened world and that this has already been made flesh in Jesus Christ. "But the King's business requireth haste."

THE MESSAGE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT AND THE ORDERS OF HUMAN SOCIETY

by

MARTIN DIBELIUS

C

THE MESSAGE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT AND THE ORDERS OF HUMAN SOCIETY

A CHRISTIAN interpretation of the orders of human society as understood by the Protestant Church must be founded on the New Testament. But we must guard against bringing questions to the New Testament to which it will give no fundamental answer, and then in embarrassment picking out texts here and there and straining their meaning. For instance, the words "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's"[1] are spoken in rebuke of the sham "pious" zeal of the questioners, but they do not constitute a basic law of the Christian philosophy of the State. Anyone who desires to consider the nature of the human orders in the light of the New Testament should not take isolated sayings but should first of all look at the gospel message as a whole.

A. *The fundamental position of the New Testament*

1. The question under consideration is that of the "orders." The New Testament knows and mentions individual phenomena which we describe as "orders"; but it is not acquainted with the idea of an "order" in our sense of the word. I shall not narrow down the conception from the outset by a definition, but shall employ it for all phenomena which regulate the communal life of humanity. These may be orders of a natural kind (the orders of the sexual life, the family, or the orders which are constituted by human beings belonging by nature to similar groups such as the race or nation). This term may also apply, however, to men bound together by some common institution (law, State, custom). Finally, men may be

[1] Mark xii. 17ff.

grouped according to their social relations (classes, callings, economic groups) and be made subject thereby to some order.

The question of such orders of human life, their origin in God, their degeneration in the world, and the obligation they lay on man, is not of paramount importance for the New Testament; the message of the New Testament tends rather to foretell the end of these orders. According to Mark xii. 25 and 1 Cor. vii. 29–31 marriage ceases with the present age. The words about the First and the Last[1] also exclude the human social scale from the Kingdom of God. The apocalyptic descriptions of the fall of Babylon must have been taken by the readers—whatever the author's original intention may have been—to refer to the State at enmity with God; consequently the eighteenth chapter of Revelation foretold the end of civilization, the technique and the economy of this State. Thus the central message of the New Testament contains no theology of our present orders.

2. What stands in the foreground of the New Testament message is rather the *proclamation of the New World*, in which the old orders are no longer of account. How far this new world will also contain orders (and moreover, how far these orders would then represent a renewal of an old, lost condition of the world)—it is not for men to judge. That is a matter for God alone; as Jesus expressly stated in replying to the sons of Zebedee.[2]

The typical example of the New Testament message is the Sermon on the Mount. The words of Jesus, of which it consists, were originally spoken to announce God's absolute Will, without reference to the circumstances of this world, their conditions and their requirements. Thus these words give expression to the law of the coming

[1] Mark x. 31; Luke xiii. 30; Matt. xx. 16.
[2] Mark x. 40.

Kingdom of God. Since, however, they are spoken in this world, their announcement of the absolute Will of God takes the form of a criticism of this world and presupposes its conflicts and also its formal religious usages.[1] Now as these words of Jesus were included in the Sermon on the Mount, they were intended as an application of the law of the Kingdom of God to the life of the Christian, even in the old world. Nevertheless, the Sermon on the Mount was no programme of reform for this world, for it is not adapted to the special requirement of this world:[2] when it forbids swearing it is not thinking of safeguarding justice or the State by means of the oath, and when it forbids anxiety it is not thinking of the ethical and economic necessity for thrift.

Thus the Sermon on the Mount contains two elements; in the proclamation of the absolute Will of God it announces an eschatological Kingdom of Heaven surpassing all human possibilities, in which that Will shall really be done on Earth as it is being done in Heaven. But it demands also of the believer that he shall submit himself here and now to this unconditional Will of God, although he knows that he cannot carry it out to the full. To be a Christian is to bear witness to the coming Kingdom of God during our life in this world. The fact that in so doing the Christian is always conscious of the gulf between the two worlds is admitted by the absolute character of the commandments contained in the Sermon on the Mount. Thus the Sermon on the Mount can give promises, and at the same time it can judge; for the Christian it is both the Gospel of the Kingdom and a testimony to God's absolute Will.

[1] For the former, see Matt. v. 23, 39, 40, and for the latter Matt. v. 23; vi. 1–18.

[2] See however Matt. v. 32 for the exception in the prohibition of divorce.

What has been said about the Sermon on the Mount applies in principle to the whole message of the New Testament: existing conditions give the occasion for proclaiming the Kingdom that is to come, and at the same time make clear the cleavage between the present and the future and thus judge the present. Hence all present conditions, including the so-called "orders," are relative; the actual value of these orders is not emphasized in the New Testament.

3. Thus all existing orders are regarded by the Gospel as *being in need of redemption.* They belong to the world and some day God will bring the course of this world to an end. The proclamation of the Gospel message makes all the orders of human life relative.

This naturally applies to all the orders which have been constructed in the course of historical development, such as the Law, the State and the Social Order. But it also applies to those orders which seem in our view to have been established by Nature. As we have already seen (in Mark xii. 25) there is to be an end of marrying and giving in marriage. Another relevant passage is 1 Cor. vi. 13, the organism of the human body (here represented by the "belly") will come to an end. And finally, reference should be made to Rom. viii. 19, to the "earnest expectation" of every creature, that is, of all created beings, who groan under the curse of the transitory.

Particularly if we wish to found a conception of the orders on the basis of the New Testament, it is absolutely necessary to begin by making the following negative statement: the New Testament does not set out to speak primarily of the various orders (possibly given by God and spoiled by sin) of this human life of ours, but it gives the foremost place to the dominion of God, which is to come, and indeed has already begun with the appearance of Jesus Christ in the world. The New Testament indeed is chiefly

concerned with that which is to come and not with that which already is. And that which already is must fashion its behaviour on the pattern of that which is to come: that is the content of the New Testament teaching on repentance. But the new forms which the present may have to assume under the influence of that which is to come—this great theme of Christian ethics is scarcely touched in the New Testament: for it is by no means certain that what is will have time enough to construct such new forms.

B. *The New Testament and the Existing Orders*

4. Thus, so far as the existing orders of human life are concerned, the New Testament speaks first and foremost of their need of redemption. But as regards their origin and their nature, the New Testament maintains the connection with the Old Testament; it derives from thence its outlook on the processes of human life and of history. To a great extent it is a question of Jewish internal traditions which have no significance for the message of the New Testament.[1] No theology of the orders can be derived from these traditions because they contain no "message" which could serve as the basis for a doctrine. Nevertheless, the Old Testament does contain certain general characteristic convictions regarding the connection between God, creation, and history which the New Testament has taken over and proclaimed.

(*a*) All created life comes ultimately from God, the Creator and Preserver, i.e. the Lord of all creation. This conviction applies primarily to the whole of the life of creation and not particularly to its orders. But the most comprehensive and magnificent presentation of God contained in the Book of Job[2] draws men's attention pre-

[1] An example of this is the aetiology of various callings given in the genealogy of the descendants of Cain (Genesis iv. 20–22) regarding Jabal, Jubal, and Tubal-Cain.

[2] Job 38–41.

cisely to the regularity of the processes in the cosmos and in the animal world and, on that basis (that is the specially Old Testament attitude), preaches the submission of man to the absolute rule of God. Thus God is proclaimed as the cosmic law-giver.

(*b*) Historical life also comes ultimately from God, who is the guide and judge of everything that happens, and hence the Lord of History. This conviction is the result of the teaching of the prophets in Israel. It dares to place the realm of history side by side with the realm of creation and to assign significance to all apparently anti-Divine forces in both realms merely in so far as they are an instrument in the hands of God, the Ruler of all.[1] The historical object used to illustrate the prophet's conception is the history of the people of Israel. The conviction that this history is a history of salvation is also held by the New Testament.[2] In this people God has revealed His will through the law. That is the belief of both the Old and the New Testaments.[3]

According to the Bible, creation and history are intimately related to one another.[4] In the Old Testament, Psalms 104 and 105 speak in the same tone of the wonders of God in Nature and in History. Psalm 136 praises the Lord of creation as of history in the same liturgy and with the same words. The events of the present day are ordained by God the Creator.[5]

5. Created life is not to be placed above historic life. The judgment on the story of the Creation—that "it was very good"—refers to a paradisiac world in which we do not live. It is part of our belief in God the Creator that, with this creation, orders were also instituted that gave a clear indication of God's will. The conviction that man was originally related to God is also part of this belief.

[1] Isa. x. 5 ff. [2] Acts xiii. 17. [3] Cf. para. 8.
[4] See Acts xvii. 24, 25 and xvii. 26, 27. [5] Ps. cxix. 91.

All this is belief, not perception. For we live in a fallen world, in which all created life (a) both the orders instituted with it (b) and also the nature of man, (c) has become distorted and hence ambiguous. (Some German theologians call it "demonic," by which they mean "standing between God and the Devil.")

(*a*) It is necessary to emphasize particularly this question of *created life*, because both the theories of natural law, and a certain naïve view of the Bible, tend to represent creation (apart from mankind) as unimpaired and full of meaning. But this is not the teaching of the Bible.[1] The most powerful Biblical presentation of the Creator and Ruler of the world, Job xxxviii–xli, mentions the riddle of nature precisely in order to emphasize the fact that man cannot solve this riddle. All profound consideration of Nature encounters irrationalities both in the animal and vegetable world (e.g. the brutal right of the stronger) which belie the ordinary theology of the Enlightenment.

(*b*) The orders too, which were appointed with the Creation (sexual life, family, work of the "most natural" kind, cultivation of the soil) have become ambiguous, i.e. they still point to the Creator's command, yet they actually provoke man to disobedience or excess. The Bible itself points this out with regard to the sexual impulse,[2] which, however, is shown to be important in contrast to the Gnostic depreciation of the created world (especially in the rules for family life and in the Pastoral Epistles). The orders of the family and of the household may nevertheless hinder men from hearing the call of God.[3] The equivocal nature of work, however, precisely in its most "natural" form, is indicated in the Bible in the curse so often criticized nowadays: "In the sweat of thy face

[1] Cf. Gen. iii. 16, 17; Rom. viii. 19–22.
[2] Matt. v. 27—30; Rom. i. 26–27.
[3] Matt. viii. 21; Luke x. 40.

shalt thou eat bread."[1] The curse consists in the fact that what God requires of man has become a burden to him and not a pleasure, and thus provokes him to resistance. We might also indicate other "natural" orders which are equivocal in the Bible sense. The diversity of races, for instance, is given by the Creator, who has His own intention in so doing. But what, in itself, signifies a boon and abundance necessarily leads in this world to hatred and strife.

(*c*) The nature of Man has also become ambiguous in a fallen world. If everything in man's life were in order, we should recognize the Creator from the Works of creation, and thus possess a natural knowledge of God. But man has allowed himself to be led astray into idolatry by created things; this is stated in Rom. i. 19. (This possibility of knowing God is here expressed in phraseology which sounds like that used by the "natural law" philosophers; but since it is followed by a negation, it cannot be taken as supporting the theory of an unimpaired natural law.) If everything were in order with man, he would know God's Will from the Law. But this very Law, which is good in itself, has become a provocation to man to do evil, although God cannot be "blamed" for this and man cannot be absolved from his responsibility—this is stated in Rom. vii. 7. But in spite of all, "man"—i.e. that which distinguishes him from the animals—is the postulate of the Biblical revelation. A full knowledge of God and complete obedience are impossible for him, but he can accept the revelation, and he can believe, love, and hope.[2] In this we can perceive a remnant of the likeness of God in which man was made, but we should remember that the Bible makes no further statements regarding the relation of the man of to-day to the man of Eden.

[1] Genesis iii. 19.

[2] Cf. para. 10.

6. From certain New Testament passages some thinkers have come to believe that they ascribe to man a natural aptitude for the knowledge of God and for obedience. In reality, these passages, in the context of the message of repentance (i.e. passages intended for the warning and exhortation of men having knowledge of revelation), refer to the righteousness of certain men who are unacquainted with revelation. At the same time it is always presupposed that these men are really estranged from God, and it is pointed out—for the most part as a reproach to those who believe in the revelation—that without revelation the others achieve a *relative* approximation to God's Will.

(*a*) Thus, according to Matt. xxi. 31, "the publicans and the harlots go into the Kingdom of God before you." Those addressed are to be put to shame by the attitude of the publicans and harlots. This might be interpreted, from the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican, and from John ix. 41, to mean: They at least know of their distance from God; but you imagine yourselves to be near to God —that was the sin of the persons here addressed.

(*b*) Thus, according to Rom. ii. 14–16, the Gentiles do the works of the law, or at any rate feel in their conscience that they lack something. It is clearly intended to put to shame the self-satisfied judges spoken of in Rom. ii. 1, and also by making mention of conscience to speak, as it were, the language of the Gentiles—otherwise a conscience would also have to be allowed to those addressed. Here, in fact, the term "conscience" has something peculiar about it; in the other passages in St. Paul's earlier epistles conscience means "consciousness"—the use of the phrase a "good conscience" or a "bad conscience" belongs to another line of thought.

(*c*) In the same way the Athenians[1] have an intuition

[1] Acts xvii. 23.

of the unknown God; but this intuition is regarded as a justification for the preaching of the Gospel, and not as any substitute or even as a positive preparation for the Gospel. On the contrary, the Athenians are described as worshippers of idols.[1]

But the Gentiles are no more righteous than the publicans and harlots are pious, or the Athenians monotheistic (in the Bible sense); for they have to hear the accusing voice of their conscience. It is thus incorrect to find here the Stoic doctrine of natural law. Philosophic expressions of this kind (cf. "nature," "conscience") certainly remind us of the latter, but there is no question of real righteousness. The whole emphasis is laid on the fact of a relative rectitude in the midst of perversity; the question of the state of man before the Fall is not raised.

7. The orders of historical life (Law, State, social order) differ from those mentioned under paragraph 5 in that they are not given to mankind with his existence, but only appear in a developed social life, i.e. in history. But this is no fundamental difference, for history is connected with creation. Thus, according[2] to the Bible, there are two things to be said about these orders:

(*a*) God wills order (1 Cor. xii. 18; xiv. 33), but this does not mean that a given national, legal, or social order is authorized by Him, but that the historical orders in general lie in the direction of His Will.

(*b*) But in this world wrong arises out of right; the security established by the State produces the insecurity of international tension, the economic order produces the disorder of social unrest. It is precisely for the domain of law that the antitheses of Matt. 5 make it clear that the literal fulfilment of the commands of the law (even those of the Old Testament) falls short of the absolute Will of God. The fulfilment of the Will of God expressed

[1] Acts xvii. 16.

[2] See para. 4.

in the Fifth Commandment is not secured by the avoidance of murder and manslaughter. God's Will is concerned rather with an inner change of the human being, which cannot be achieved by any law. The same applies to the criticism of the Sixth Commandment, of the taking of oaths and revenge, contained in the Sermon on the Mount.

Thus these orders too are equivocal. God's Will, the "law" of the coming Kingdom, takes precedence and priority over all the positive legislation (including the working of the Laws of Israel). But the Law of Nature also (which is not a Biblical conception), as well as universal human ideas,[1] or the commands of some particular variety within the human race,[2] fail to express the pure Will of God. Rather the general tendency of Christian ethics as a whole is indicated in Rom. viii. 4, as life—"after the Spirit."

8. It is doubtless the conviction of the Old and New Testament, however, that God has chosen a certain nation, the people of Israel, as the place for His revelation. Their national, legal, and social order must therefore be considered first to see whether and in what way it represents God's "actual" Will.

It is necessary first to make a historical observation. The laws which stabilize these orders are of very varying antiquity. We know that many provisions of the laws of Israel and Judah only came into force at a later period, that is only after the Exile. We may assume that the tribes entering Palestine already brought with them some ordinances which they attributed to God's immediate revelation on Sinai. But we cannot with any certainty pick out these oldest provisions from the whole body of the law. Nor can it be said that the laws, because they come down from Sinai, are to be regarded as a Divine

[1] See para. 15. [2] See para. 16.

revelation to a greater extent than the other later enactments. Thus from the outset the laws of Israel are involved in a historic growth, so much so that many of the later laws re-emerge as the result of experience gained from earlier laws The teaching of the prophets, for instance, first introduces to the people many ideas about right religious observances, and about religion and law, which are later embodied in enactments.

Thus it is not the statutes of Israel but the history of Israel which must be regarded as a witness to God. This does not mean that the order of the people and the State of Israel is to be regarded as the Divine order binding for all time. For this order is by no means uniform. In the Old Testament we find the Kingdom rejected;[1] sometimes the Kingdom is held to be derived from God, and sometimes it is condemned for disobedience to God. In the same way the Temple and its services are variously judged. God confronts His people with ever new demands and tasks; and requires of them ever renewed obedience. Thus the revelation of God in the Old Testament consists, not in laying down once for all absolute Divine standards, but in God's dealing with His people, in choosing and rejecting them, in humbling them and being gracious to them, in making His Will known and in concealing His intentions.

In this way the History of Israel does not become the model of a State and national order willed by God, but the type of the dealing of the Lord of History with nations in general. But in statutes and historical manifestations, as in the "orders," the Will of God in this world is only expressed through a human medium, and is therefore very imperfect.

9. The New Testament was, of course, able and indeed bound to be much more clearly aware of this than the Old.

[1] Judges viii. 23; ix. 7 ff.

The message of Redemption revealed the world's need of redemption. It was a cosmic redemption that was proclaimed: consequently nothing in the world, no "chosen people," no "pure humanity" was exempted from it. Certainly the historical considerations set forth in paragraph 8 are not known to the New Testament. Nevertheless, the whole New Testament clearly recognizes that this historical order derived from God did not lead to the formation of a real nation upon earth. Hence it is convinced of the *apostasy of Israel.*

There is already foundation for this conviction in the Old Testament itself; the continual oscillation in the nation's attitude towards God, between obedience and apostasy, and consequently between a state of grace and one of condemnation, is expressly pointed out in 1 Cor. x. 1–13 and Acts vii. But apart from this the conviction of Israel's apostasy is confirmed by the experiences of contemporary Judaism in the most convincing fashion.

(*a*) The observance of the ceremonial law led the Jews to a sort of ritual rigidity. The Gospel, in accordance with the teaching of the prophets, emphasizes this repeatedly in connection with the rigid Sabbatarian practices of the Jews.

(*b*) In general, legalistic piety led the Jews into moral hypocrisy, that is, into imagining that they were satisfying the claims of God by fulfilling thousands of commandments, while they ignored what God actually required of them. The teaching of the prophets, too, had already followed this line of thought. In the gospel of Jesus, however, the criticism of the religious observances and the practice of ceremonial cleanliness of the pious Jews is entirely directed against the fact that such piety prevents those who practise it from recognizing God's Will.[1]

(*c*) For the first generation of Christians, the most convincing proof of the apostasy of the Jews is, naturally,

[1] Matt. vi. 1; Mark vii. 1; Matt. xxiii. 1; cf. also Rom. ii. 17.

the death of Christ, caused by the pious leaders of His own nation. The self-consciousness of Israel has led to the death of the Messiah!

(*d*) To this is added the equally convincing experience of the early missionary work of the Church: the self-consciousness of Israel allows the nation to miss the salvation which is at length revealed.[1] The problem for a Jew like St. Paul is not first and foremost a national problem, but one of theodicy: How can God reject His people? This is why St. Paul always returns to the problem of what election and law really mean.[2] (If he could not find an answer to this question, there was nothing left but the solution of Marcion, that the Father of Jesus Christ was not the God of the Old Testament at all, but a new God!)

Moreover a special difficulty in the discussion of these questions between the different Churches is presented by the use of the word "Law." "Law" may express God's call to man; in this sense the whole of the Old Testament and not only the code of commandments, is the Law;[3] in this sense the Sermon on the Mount was described as the "Law of the Kingdom of God"; in this sense everything is Law that expresses the absolute Divine command.[4] The word "Law" may, however, also mean the Old Testament code, the validity of which came to an end with Christ. In the language of the Church, finally, "Law" is also used to designate an order existing in the nature of things.[5] If misunderstandings are to be avoided, attention must be paid to these differences in discussions between the representatives of different Churches.

[1] See 1 Thess. ii. 15, 16.
[2] See Rom. iii. 1ff; ix. 1 ff.
[3] See para. 8.
[4] See Rom. viii. 4.
[5] Cf. in the New Testament, Rom. vii. 21.

C. *Christian Existence in the World.*

10. Out of this world there now arises, as a nucleus of the new world, the band of disciples, the Christian community—not as though it were already the Kingdom of God; its bond consists of belief in the Kingdom and preparedness for the Kingdom. The Christian community is therefore not based in the first instance on orders which could regulate its existence in this world, but on its relation to the Kingdom of God.

It would be best, in order not to prejudice the case, to express this state by the formula which the Christians, perhaps even before St. Paul, themselves employed to describe their existence in the world. The nature of the Christian life is based upon *faith, love, and hope*. This means that it consists in radical obedience (11), superhuman love (12), and treating everything that exists as relative and provisional (13). Faith, love, hope: this is the Magna Charta of every Christian collective order. Every other order must be measured by this standard, every system of ethics must be an expression of this Ethos, or it is not Christian.

It is therefore not in accordance with the New Testament to relate Christianity to the orders in a "theology of the orders," as though both were partners with equal rights. First of all, rather, we ought to describe Christian existence and then ask whether and in what way these orders can be considered as included within it.

11. *Faith in God* as found in the New Testament is expressed in the commandment derived from the Old Testament of the unconditional love of God. This means that the "one thing needful" must rank supreme above all else (i.e. not the individual "salvation of the soul" but the right attitude of mind towards God and the coming of His Kingdom).

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But by "all else" is meant not only what St. Paul would describe as "the flesh" (cf. the passage about "offences" in Matt. v. 29), but also the whole world of duties. This applies towards the family and to pious duties like burying one's father, and duties towards guests and the poor,[1] to religious duties (the Sabbath) and to dutiful care, and finally also to our duty towards the State (for the apparent parallelism of Mark xii. 17[2] is intended naturally to lead to the recognition of the supremacy of man's duty towards God). First and foremost comes obedience to what God requires at this very moment, and it is this obedience alone that has to be radical.

The parables of the Hid Treasure and the Priceless Pearl, the deepened exposition of the law, the saying about seeking first the Kingdom of God[3] proclaim in the Gospels the radical obedience of faith. In the Epistles of St. Paul, the passages which speak most clearly on the subject are Rom. xiv. 7, 8 and Col. iii. 17, but Rom. xiv. 23 may also be mentioned in this connection. Luther expressed the same idea when he made the explanation of all the commandments dependent on the fulfilment of the First, and prefaced the explanation of the others with "We must fear and love God, so that we act in this or that way."

This reveals the dynamic character of the Christian ethic. For it there is no absolutely binding static doctrine of values or goods or virtues. God speaks ever afresh to men, by bringing them into new situations. The preaching and teaching of the Church must accordingly seek to understand the radical obedience of faith ever anew, and to teach its application to changed situations. The whole "Life and Work" movement serves to establish a consensus of opinion regarding these things between the

[1] Luke x. 41; Mark xiv. 6.

[2] "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's."

[3] Matt. vi. 33.

Churches (and as a prerequisite at any particular time there must be a consensus of opinion within the individual Churches and theological groups). Such a consensus of opinion can, however, only refer to the world situation at a given time; the radical claim of God, as contained in the Gospel, remains the same and is as valid to-day as it was then.

Over and above the teaching of the Church, the believer must constantly ask himself afresh: What is required of me, here and now, as a Christian? In so doing he is not demanding any "private revelation" but he hears only the words addressed to him by God, through the medium of his own situation in life. In normal cases he will be guided by the exposition and application of the Scriptures and by the teaching of the Church. But in all final and ultimate decisions he is helped by none save God alone; here the Church doctrine and the moral law are of no avail. This dynamic doubtless brings a certain unrest into the Christian ethic, because it is not subjected once for all to the standards which are valid for the world. On the other hand, however, the believer brings to bear on the work which is now entrusted to him by God a quite different power and willingness from that which is possible according to the standards of this world. For he knows that the task, however "worldly" it may be, has been set him by God, and he does it "heartily, as to the Lord and not unto men." And in this way by his attitude he can reveal to men what is the real origin of his strength and thus become a preacher by his deeds.[1]

12. The *love of the Christian* consists in receiving and passing on the love with which God has loved him.[2] It is also faith in action (Gal. v. 6); this connection is further emphasized in James ii. 14 ff. and described in the First

[1] Matt. v. 16; 1 Peter ii. 12, 15.

[2] Cf. the parables in Matt. xviii. and Luke vii.

Epistle of St. John as the characteristic feature of Christianity. This love can therefore be called the love of Christ (2 Cor. v. 14; Rom. viii. 35), for God has revealed it in Christ (Rom. viii. 39; John iii. 16).

In effect "all things" are possible to this love, that is, it is of a superhuman kind—and thus differs from a philanthropy limited by human possibilities or from the humanitarianism which reverences the Divine "spark" in every human being. The love of Christ knows no bounds and therefore succeeds in overcoming all human limitations however "justifiable": enmity (loving one's enemies —here the most difficult thing is not the military enemy, but the private enemy whom one "can't bear" to the point of hatred), strangeness, rank, race, class, and also feelings of detestation and repugnance. Just as Christian faith believes "against hope"[1] so Christian love ventures to love even in "hopeless" cases (epileptics, idiots, hardened criminals). "In Christ" even the natural differences of race and nation are overcome.[2] This does not mean that these differences are denied, however; indeed it is expressly stated that they do exist in the present age; otherwise they would not require to be overcome "in Christ" but from the rational point of view they would not exist at all.

The command to love one's enemies speaks of the extreme case to which Christian love must extend. But it does not speak of an isolated record-breaking effort which, when accomplished in itself, constitutes Christianity. The enemies and strangers who become our neighbours when God puts them in our way, must not make us forget the neighbours who are near to us by nature, the people who are commended to us through the orders of the family, the nation, the calling. Thus, in the Gospel, the rich man who wants to do something

[1] Rom. iv. 18. [2] Gal. iii. 28; Col. iii. 11.

very special is referred to the commandments, and St. Paul not only writes the Thirteenth chapter of his letter to the Corinthians but also includes in his exhortations rules for domestic life.

Thus there now arises a wholly new emphasis on the orders "in Christ." They are first deprived of their absolute character by a radical faith in God, and cease to be a law unto themselves; for in the light of revelation they appear equivocal. But they now become of value for Christian love in a new sense; they indicate the opportunity for the exercise of this love; they contain the occasion and the stimulus for the life of the Christian in the world. Henceforward they receive a Christian meaning; henceforward the Christian must commit himself in principle to their maintenance, so far as radical faith in God does not command otherwise. This appreciation of the orders by the Christian has nothing to do with conservatism or patriarchalism. He knows that his love must far surpass the boundaries of the orders. But it is for this very reason that he knows he is not slavishly subject to the orders, but can cheerfully accept them in faith in the Lord of all Orders, for this world and for its daily course.

13. *Christian hope* knows that the orders are not final. Like the whole of this age they are transitional; it is not our business to enquire how long it may please God to retain this world and its orders.

The hope of the Christian consists in the conviction, expressed also in the Old Testament, that the course of the world, as it is now, is contrary to the intentions of God, and that God will one day assume His unrestricted sway over this world. This will mean a complete breach with all that had existed until that decisive moment; there can be no question of the Kingdom of God as the result of an evolutionary process; the Lord cometh as a thief

in the night.[1] Thus Christians have no illusions about the nature of this world; it is not striving after God.

On the other hand, Christians (like the Church) are witnesses to God's Will in this world, and bring this testimony to bear upon the world.[2] The orders can supply them with the necessary sociological framework, as we see in Romans xiii, for instance, in regard to the State. But the orders remain part of this world and are not a type of the coming Kingdom of God. To what extent they are more than a framework, to what extent they themselves, in spite of all their sinfulness, represent God's work in the world, depends upon their quality. These differences must not be overlooked; St. Paul speaks in Romans xiii of "higher powers" which are certainly not specially Christian nor specially ideal; there have been forms of the State which were nearer the Gospel than the Roman State of Claudius or of Nero. But he is speaking, all the same, of powers which reward the good and punish the evil; there have been other powers as well.

14. (*Recapitulation of* 11–13.) Thus, especially under normal conditions, that is, when they are not constantly challenged by events or by the convictions of Christian people, in spite of their sinfulness, the orders are meant:

> to indicate God's Will and train us to obedience;
> to give occasion for the exercise of love;
> to provide the setting for the preaching of the Gospel and the assembling of the disciples of Jesus.

The orders, however especially under abnormal conditions, when they are particularly open to challenge,

> may come into contradiction with God's Will, so that God will demand the infringement of an order;

[1] 1 Thess. v. 2; Luke xii. 39.

[2] Matt. v. 14–16.

by their limitations they may restrict the limitless extent of Christian love, so that God will call us out over and beyond the order;
in their sinfulness they may make out that it is an illusion that we could set up God's Kingdom in the world—so that God will call us out of the orders and show the way to His Kingdom. This may also apply to the order of the Church as an organization.

D. *Natural Law*

15. Thus from the Christian standpoint at which we have arrived, a very brief criticism may be given of natural law.

If it is contended that it is possible to deduce *absolute ideas* of law, freedom, duty, from the agreement of men, then it must be stated that, to begin with, such a deduction would be completely contrary to the Bible; the Christian knows absolutism only in God's command, God's dominion, God's grace. Human ideas receive from God their accomplishment and their judgment. It is precisely from the historical perspective given in the Old and in the New Testament[1] that the Christian knows that God's command sounds different to different men at different times. He must, therefore, refrain from taking certain concrete ideas of this kind as absolutely binding; this would be to set up, alongside the dominion of God, another sovereignty having an equal claim. Such ideas are products of the historical development of the human mind: worthy of recognition in their significance for this world, but human, fallible, and relative.

It should be added that the "universal" recognition of such ideas, if taken concretely, is based on a fallacy. Actually what is understood by right and duty, state and

[1] Rom. 9–11.

calling, and even truth and freedom, is at different times and among different nations and groups of mankind by no means the same thing. This fallacy, however, is typical of the point of view of every period of "Enlightenment," whether that of late antiquity or of the eighteenth century. The standard taken as "universally human" is that of a certain European middle class. Foreign races, persons who have lost caste, a-social individuals are ignored. The fact that Christian love ventures to consider such people as capable of redemption was emphasized in paragraph 12.

In speaking of these things, we must not omit to mention how much the modern psychology of the unconscious has done in the way of criticism of the "universally human." It has unveiled the sub-consciousness of this respectable bourgeois existence: a host of impulses are repressed but not destroyed, which, if they were suddenly to break loose from their banishment, might make a criminal of any "respectable" man; the proof of their existence in man's subconscious demonstrates that the perfection of pure humanity is an illusion. This applies also to the idea of the nations living together in what is called "humanity." Great political catastrophes constantly demonstrate afresh that this humanity is living on the edge of a volcano, and that international assurances are only honest if they are understood politically, that is, in a realistic, secular sense, so that a sudden outbreak of eruptive forces is not excluded as something impossible. But events teach us over and over again that these guarantees are fallacies if they are based on the absolute validity of human rights, of freedom and equality.

16. This criticism of natural law will be accepted by all who do not insist on making the obligatory basis of ethics a "humanity" which is posited as an absolute, but find this basis rather in those elements in human life which bind human groups together into an "order,"

that is, the *racial inheritance* (which is also described by the word "blood"—understood symbolically, of course, and not physiologically). The first thing to be said is that this standard is not concrete enough for all the individual questions of morality. For it is evident that the various trends of life, ruling ideals, moral forces and counter-forces within these groups of humanity are by no means homogeneous. The contrast between the Greek and the Germanic system of thought within the Aryan race, the contrast between the intellectual tendencies in Germany and Scandinavia and the variations in the attitude of life of the German stocks make it, at the least, very difficult to derive from any Aryan, Teutonic, or German "original will" a moral "original canon" which contains more than general ideas, as they are mentioned in paragraph 15.

But in regard to this method of making the natural inheritance into an absolute, Christianity must first and foremost point out that here this world is being substituted for the world above, the human for the Divine, the sinful for the holy. There are not only positive qualities in the inheritance of races, nations and stocks, but also characteristic defects. A paradoxical complication is here brought to light: one of the highest spiritual values, the endowment of certain groups of humanity with special qualities, which gives to these groups their rank and their special duties, has as a corollary the fact that these very groups are prone to certain sins. But in this very paradox there appears once more the need for redemption of every creature.[1]

The criticism of paragraphs 15 and 16 is also valid, of course, if the particular values (human, racial, or national) are not regarded as given potentialities yet to be realized, but as ideals which have not yet been realized towards which we must strive—in the one case by education, in the other by discipline. Even when this

[1] See paras. 3 and 5.

ideal is put forward in as pure a form as possible, it remains of this world. And the development achieved by human effort has nothing to do with Christian eschatology which awaits fulfilment by God. Moreover, there is no reason to suppose that evolution always moves in an upward direction. Here again we have a thoroughly "burgeois" fallacy, which regards the undeniable increase of the good things of civilization in peaceful times as a guarantee of permanent "progress."

17. But it must once more be stated, in connection with paragraph 14, that the force informing these ideals of a national and human character is within this world a real and noble force. Traces of the Gospel virtues are often found in those who may be fallible men and women and yet embody part of the message in a way which is most impressive to us. In the same way the values, ideals, institutions, events of our natural, social life (from marriage, by way of the nation to all mankind) may become vehicles for the love and the grace of God, and not only that, but of His call and our duty. Emulation is worth more than the study of principles; co-operation, even in a community of questionable composition, if justified by the aim and the method of work, is always more Christian than a sanctimonious aloofness from the world.

The Christian in particular should have no scruples about acknowledging the orders of society in this world, since he has no illusions about the real nature of the communities in question—they are of this world, that is, tainted with sin and therefore questionable. If he knows that he has been set to such work within the orders by God, no disillusion can shake his conviction that God has called him to His work. For he knows the Lord of all orders, and also the true character of everything man-made which awaits redemption.

The Christian finds a certain difficulty in the fact that

nowadays, in the domain of these orders, many expressions are used which he is accustomed to apply to God's relations with the world: revelation, faith, God's work, eternal, God-given, etc. When under the deepest impressions of their lives men seize on the highest words, this is psychologically intelligible and has always been the case (e.g. in the language of love between the sexes), and it has never caused serious prejudice to the honour of God, who is Lord of these experiences also. Certainly if such expressions are formulated into a theory and intended to hold good beyond the moment, then it becomes the duty of the Christian, not from anxiety on theological or ecclesiastical grounds, but for the sake of truth, to be on his guard against an undue mixture of the Divine and the worldly, even in the use of language. At the same time, he should not forget that he stands in the relation of a brother to everyone who believes in the God revealed in Jesus Christ, even if that one is too ready to call earthly things by this Divine name. It is, of course, quite a different matter if God is invoked in connection with deeds which are obviously contrary to His call. The fact that in such cases the Christian faith demands resistance is the self-evident consequence of the radical nature of Christian obedience.

CHRISTIAN FAITH AND THE COMMON LIFE

by

WILLIAM TEMPLE, Archbishop of York

CHRISTIAN FAITH AND THE COMMON LIFE

One source of much bewilderment in our time is the fact that to some extent the Two Great Commandments have been allowed to fall apart in men's minds. Religion, of which love towards God is the culmination, has come to be regarded as "a private affair between a man and his Maker," whereas love of neighbour has been treated as the substantial duty of men, and as possible of fulfilment apart from love towards God. It is true that the greater part of the drudgery of social service, and almost the whole so far as it aims at restoration of character, is actually carried on by Christian people in the inspiration of their Christian faith. Love of God and love of neighbour do not fall apart so far as they are actual; but the thought of them in the minds of average folk has tended to fall apart, with the result that average folk miss both.

It is quite clear from the New Testament that in the teaching of our Lord and His Apostles the two are inseparable. Ecstatic worship which is devoid of charity is for all practical purposes heathen; it might as well be the "sounding brass and tinkling cymbals" familiar in the worship of Dionysus. "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar" is the terse verdict of St. John. And the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats, together with much direct moral teaching, shows that the Apostles who so spoke were fully in line with the Lord Himself.

But the moral precepts of Christ make demands so exacting that men have treated them as pointing to an ideal which is in fact irrelevant to our actual condition. They have been dubbed "Counsels of Perfection"

and regarded as binding only on monks and hermits. This crude verdict of the world is not wholly baseless; but standing alone, with more than a little acquiescence from the spokesmen of the Church, it has largely deprived Christianity of its power to lift its adherents, to say nothing of the world as a whole, to a new plane. There have in fact been two forces tending to destroy the moral appeal and impetus of the Gospel. One is the pessimism of much religious orthodoxy, which regards this world as so utterly "fallen" and corrupt that it is itself beyond redemption, so that the purpose of the Gospel is not to save the world but to save individuals out of the world; the other is the optimism of much modern and rationalistic philosophy, which thinks that there is no more amiss with human nature than increase of knowledge and spread of education can put right.

The problem, represented by this bifurcation into an optimism that effects nothing and a pessimism which thinks nothing can be effected, is rendered more acute by the scale upon which all activity in the modern world must be planned. The development of man's control over nature has had the result of binding men together in units both larger and more closely knit. No concern is now either purely personal or purely local. Whatever is done in one place immediately affects conditions elsewhere. Consequently, the planning of life passes increasingly into the hands of the state, which alone surveys all areas within its frontiers, and we find that as the state exercises its sovereign rights within those frontiers it affects the interests of people living beyond them. When "charity" could be fully exercised in the personal dealings of individuals, the Christian law of love seemed to be applicable in practice. But in the modern world this condition is not met. A Christian can, of

course, be "kind" to unemployed men; he ought to be kind to them, as to all others; but this does not begin to meet the distinctive need of the unemployed. That need cannot be met without entry upon the sphere of "politics." How does the law of love apply here?

If we keep our eyes open, there are many opportunities to be taken, and the utilization of them greatly sweetens the whole atmosphere. The Christian ratepayers of a London borough lately sent a deputation to their Borough Council to ask that the rates might be increased in order that slum-clearance might be initiated; and though their request was refused, the making of it certainly contributed to mutual good-will. When, some years ago, a large number of income-tax-payers wrote to their Parliamentary representatives to ask that the prospective surplus on the Budget should be used to restore unemployment relief to its former figure before it was used to reduce the rate of income-tax, this undoubtedly led to a greater feeling among the unemployed that they were, and were recognized as being, members of a spiritual community.

But when all is said, the conspicuous effect of such endeavours only illustrates their rarity. It is seldom that whole bodies of men ask that the interests of others may be preferred to their own. Is this solely because of a remediable selfishness in individuals? or is there some inherent law of corporate relationships which hinders in those relationships the operation of the law of Love? and if there is, is this part of the ordinance of God or is it a product of the corruption of our nature?

The occasions which prompt these enquiries are concrete situations, each of them peculiar in some degree; and no general proposition is likely to be directly applicable to any one of these without considerable adjustment. But such general propositions as can be made with truth

are far less simple than is often assumed. No one can dispute the contention that a man's duty is largely shaped for him by his social relationships. The greatest English philosopher of the last generation—F. H. Bradley—found in the formula, My Station and Its Duties, the leading principle of practical Ethics; and even though we may think that it does not carry us so far as he supposed, we must recognize that a man's station, when once he has accepted it, very largely determines his obligations. The sacrifice of a useful and lucrative career in order to take up some form of social service involving great risk to health—for example in a leper colony—may be noble in a bachelor, questionable in a husband, and blame-worthy in a father. The fact that we might admire a father who incurred our censure by such an act, because our own grounds for declining the opportunity would be still more censurable than his conduct, does not alter the other fact that, quite apart from complications due to sin, we recognize social relationships as introducing a modification into the content of duty.

As a matter of fact, each man confronting a need for moral choice, whether on his own part or on that of others, must also take account of the reality of sin alike in himself and in them. If it is his own act that is in question, he must not only think what is the ideally right thing to be done, but whether or not he is disqualified by sin from doing it. This is sometimes forgotten or even denied. But we recognize an obligation to allow for all other forms of disqualification; and there are some actions ideally right in principle, yet only right when done by someone of sufficiently fine character. Thus free forgiveness of injuries is ideally right; but some righteous indignation may be preferable to an indolent acquiescence in wrong, though the former may cause an alienation which the latter avoids. Sincerity is a prerequisite

of moral action, and even more so of moral judgment; an element of conscientious primness in a Christian act may make it more detestable than a healthy animal outbreak. What some psychologists call "the conventional self," while often a guardian of commonly accepted morality, is as often a serious hindrance to spiritual effectiveness. The agent, the actually operative will, in a truly Christian act, must be the genuine self of the person acting, not a "phantasy" which that self has created and put forward as a façade to impress either the virtuous or the multitude. Consequently the truly Christian action is possible only for the truly Christian man. The same outward conduct done by someone only half-converted (which is a true description of nearly all of us) is vitiated. Only Christ can do the acts of Christ. In so far as man is truly a "member" of the "body," moving only at the direction of His will, he becomes an organic instrument of Christ; in so far as he falls short of that, the question, "What would Jesus do?" is for him as misleading as it is suggestive of the ideally right course.

In short, the Gospel must be taken as a whole, not piecemeal. Christ laid down the Law of Love; He also offered the redemptive sacrifice of His perfect obedience to the Father and thereby supplied the power to those who, by spiritual union with Him, offer a perfect obedience, to fulfil that Law. But to others that Law presents a demand which they cannot meet; nothing outside themselves prevents them, but by their own selves they are prevented. The Christian who considers what action he should take in any emergency, or what policy he shall as a citizen support, must allow for this fact.

How far then are the apparent necessities of the political and economic world in which we live to be regarded as part of God's ordinance for us? Here a distinction must

be drawn, as the Scholastics would say, between what God wills *simpliciter* and what God wills *secundum quid.* What God wills for all His children is the life of holiness and love. And no circumstances, no environment can render that life impossible. In every conceivable combination of circumstances it is possible to show love and to maintain purity of heart; and that is God's will for all and each. But in fact mankind has not done this; and the whole fabric of our social and political life reflects our failure to do this completely as well as our partial success. In the Second Book of the *Republic*, Plato sets out the two principles on which society is founded. In part society is a tissue of competing selfishnesses, where all agree to forgo certain methods of preying upon their neighbours and to check those who follow these, so that each may be comparatively secure in such gains as he may amass. The first form of the Social Contract is thus reached—"neither to commit nor to suffer injustice," where injustice is understood to be whatever all agree, for the selfish purposes of each, to condemn. Thus arises a code which has some semblance of morality.

> Thou shalt not kill; but needst not strive
> Officiously to keep alive.
>
> Thou shalt not covet; but tradition
> Approves all forms of competition.[1]

Over against this is the principle of mutual need and help. Men have different gifts, and the benefit of all is served by their co-operation, each doing what he does best, and supplying the needs of others equally with his own. This is the social expression of the supreme rule of Ethics—Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

Actual society rests on both of these foundations and

[1] A. H. Clough, *The New Decalogue.*

it is quite impossible to disentangle the practical working of the two principles. Both are present in nearly every social institution, policy, or action. Progress consists in the increasing preponderance of willing co-operation or love—the principle of St. Augustine's *Civitas Dei*, over competitive selfishness—the principle of his *Civitas Terrena.*

In making this point it is very easy to create misunderstanding. The co-operation which is the essential nature of all industry and commerce is not the same thing as that love of which the Gospel speaks. Even in its perfect form it could not be more than Justice—the DIKAIOSYNE of Plato's *Republic.* Yet this is a principle in full accord with Christian love, for it is an assertion of the spiritual unity which binds men and women together and of which love, in the full sense of the word, is the highest and only quite adequate manifestation. Moreover, in this sinful world, where industry and commerce have been grossly perverted from their true nature into a perpetual conflict of competing self-interests, there is little hope that a man will in fact be consistently just, unless he is inspired and upheld by a love which has its source in the love of God. Justice, in short, is the true form of love at this level of human activity, and the form will only become actual if the substance of love is present and active.

God wills love. But does this mean that where love fails He has no care for what happens? It is because the world is a "fallen" world and has not corresponded with His will for it, that the special problems of Christian conduct arise. Has God no will for His people except that they should live in a fallen world as if it were not fallen? or that being fallen themselves, they should behave outwardly as if they were not? Or has He a purpose with which men who know themselves fallen

may co-operate, using their fallen nature as in part the instrument for its own recovery?

The discussion of the whole matter has often, as I think, been falsified by over-simplification. It is sometimes said, for example, that the national community and the state belong to the Order of Nature, while the Church and the faith of the Christian belong to the Order of Grace. This sharp distinction leads to the view that the state has its own principles of action with which the Church has nothing to do, while equally the Church has its principles with which the state has nothing to do. But the statesman must ask—Is it so certain that the Church's principles have no political effects? And if they have, how can the state consent to forgo all control over the Church? And equally the theologian must ask—Is there no Grace manifest in His work? How then can the state, in its place in the Order of Nature, refuse direction from the Church to which is entrusted the full revelation of the Author of Nature? If once more it is held that Nature is so far fallen as in no way to manifest its Maker, are we to say that God has abandoned it, and left it to remain fallen and lost? Is not that a denial of the whole Gospel?

It is, no doubt, already clear, from the way in which I have put these questions, on what general lines I believe that they should be answered. This is not a theological treatise, and the theological position adopted can only be sketched in outline—not fully expounded, and still less defended or justified.

The world is of God's creation. His will for it, considered absolutely, is that it should correspond to His own nature of holiness and love. It does not so correspond. Whatever explanation is to given of the fact of evil, evil (as well as good) is a fact. The world is not wholly corrupted by evil; it still bears traces of its divine origin and God's

will for it. Whatever seems to be an essential part of the principle of its history must be ascribed to the divine will. Thus in the growth of fellowship among men, which is (on this view) a great part of the divine plan for mankind, the territorially delimited nation has its place; and a man's citizenship of his earthly nation is part of God's purpose for him. National loyalty is, therefore, in its own degree, obedience to God.

But this loyalty cannot, for the Christian, be absolute. Only God Himself is entitled to absolute loyalty. And though the national state holds authority from Him, it is not a pure transmitter of His will. It is itself part of a world which though created by God has deviated from His will for it. That will is expressed with pureness only through the Word of God, which is Jesus Christ. The Christian disciple and the Christian Church, to whom that Word is entrusted, must therefore appraise the action of his state in the light of his knowledge of the will of God as disclosed in Christ. The state has a *prima facie* claim upon his obedience; and he who appraises its actions is himself as "fallen" as it also is; therefore he must be very sure of the leading of God's Word before the sets himself in opposition to the state within its own sphere. But he is under solemn obligation to resist the state if, and so far as, he believes himself to have a clear leading from God to do so. He must not let the state take the place of God, even for a specified department of life; for that is idolatry. God alone is entitled to absolute allegiance in all relationships; and God is known in Jesus Christ.

Further the Church is bound to claim that the nation and the state owe by right an absolute allegiance to Christ, to whom all authority in heaven and on earth is given. In making that claim it must recognize that the nation may, and in all actual cases does, contain

many who are not Christians and do not acknowledge that allegiance, so that the state, as the nation's executive organ, cannot properly behave as the Church itself should do. But the Church can never admit that the state, even though all its citizens and all component members of the Government be pagans, is thereby released from its allegiance; it is disqualified for certain modes of expressing the allegiance; subjectively it may not be conscious of any obligation to express any such thing; but objectively the obligation remains.

This does not, however, entitle the Church to tell the state what its duty from time to time may be. To put the matter in terms familiar to most Englishmen, it is the duty of Westminster to obey God, and it is the duty of Lambeth to remind Westminster of this fact. But it is not the duty of Westminster to obey Lambeth, and Lambeth would be guilty of usurpation if it demanded such obedience. In other words, the political sphere has its own relative autonomy, subject to the universal obligation to exercise this in obedience to God.

If Christianity were a revised Pharisaism, like Pharisaism in offering precise directions for conduct but differing in that it offered other directions, the recognition of this relative autonomy in politics, in business, in art, or in science would be a serious difficulty. But that is not the genius of Christianity, which is emphatically a religion of the Spirit and not of the letter. The Spirit is not less exacting than the letter of the law, indeed it is more exacting. For a time may be reached when the law in the letter has been fulfilled, and then there is freedom to please one's self. But from the Spirit there is no release; it is true that those who are under the control of the Spirit do not desire release; but that does not alter the fact that none is afforded. What has here to be noticed, however, is that though the Spirit is more, and

not less, exacting than the letter, it is more adaptable to conditions. If we take as a literal command, to be obeyed at all times, "Give to him that asketh thee," we shall often do great harm. But if we treat that precept as a vivid expression of the command always to act by the generosity which love prompts, we shall do good; for love will prompt us to think out what will in fact benefit the neighbour who brings his need before us.

The actual work of the world has to be carried on subject to the conditions which history provides. The Christian man of business will have his eye fixed on the only manner of business that is in full accord with the Spirit of Christ; this includes, among other things, the conduct of business as a form of mutual help and service. Here we may pause for a moment to notice that business and commerce, when true to their own essential nature, are in complete accord with the Christian principle of life; for when they are healthy, every exchange made is to the advantage of both parties. But business and commerce are infected, like other human activities, with the egoism which is the original sin of our nature. Consequently they are not conducted wholly, or even perhaps mainly, in the spirit of mutual help. Certainly since the War, the inflated egoism of nations has prevented international commerce from being conducted in that spirit. In a world where commerce is carried on largely by a pure self-interest, and where conventions have sprung up for the regulation of that self-interest, what is the Christian man of business to do? It may be that if he follows the principles that would be exemplified by a perfectly Christian form of commerce, he will be under-sold and driven from the market, his employees thrown out of work, and the control of business handed over to men of no ideals. It will be better to face all this than to abandon the ideal itself, or

to compromise beyond the point where witness to the ideal becomes ineffectual. But it seems clear that the actual purification of commerce depends on the continuance in business of those who have ideals and steadily work towards them. If so, the duty of the Christian man of business is to follow this course. He will be subject to great temptation to go further in compromise than necessity requires; and that temptation he must resist as firmly as he can; but he must not, either on account of this temptation or on account of the compromise itself, withdraw from business and leave commerce a prey to men of no ideals.

What the extent of this compromise may be, no other can claim to judge. It could never, of course, be right for the Christian man of business to fall below the conventions established by the business itself and accepted by those who pay no heed to distinctively Christian claims. It is inconceivable that such a descent should do other than damage witness to Christian principle. Short of this, the degree of compromise to be effected can only be settled by the conscience of those concerned; nor has any other a right to sit in judgment on them.

Between what terms is such a compromise made? It is often spoken of as a compromise between the claims of God and those of the world. But our whole contention is that in relation to the circumstances God wills the compromise, and that to refuse to make it is to fail His cause. No; it is the Christian compromise between adherence to principles only practicable in the perfected Kingdom of God and the prevailing practice of the world; and its aim is not to let a Christian make money without too scandalous inconsistency, but to lead the common practice to a closer approximation to that of the Kingdom of God.

In many instances the problem of duty is complicated

for the Christian man of business by the fact that he is in greater or less measure a trustee. The welfare of all employed in the business may depend on him and he has no right to bring them to ruin by a quixotic pursuit of ideals. Even the interest of shareholders cannot with justice be ignored!

The critic may feel that in all this we are finding excuses for paying to Christian principle no more than lip-service. No; we are saying that the facts must be squarely faced, or else the service paid to Christian principle will indeed be of the lips only. It is often to be observed that, in a company of people united for the promotion of an ideal end, those who in their own practice make most progress towards that end are those who in speeches or resolutions advocate moderate courses. The true Christian will judge all he does or attempts by the highest standards, and will pronounce sinful his best achievements, but he will not on that account commit the additional sin of injuring other people for the sake of a conscience which is sensitive about his own consistency but not about their sufferings.

It is fatally easy to let such considerations become a ground for complacency; and they will in fact produce that effect unless the love of Christ is potent in the heart. They can be urged by the easy-going and prosperous man whose motto is "Be not righteous over much." But we are not concerned with him. We are concerned with the genuine Christian, passionately eager to do his utmost in loyalty to the Lord who has won the allegiance of his heart, but perplexed by the question what that utmost is. Such a man will not contentedly acquiesce in conduct that seems to make terms with the unregenerate world; his whole aspiration is set on that by which in his most exalted spiritual moods he has been apprehended; with sorrow that no more is possible he does

the utmost that the facts permit, eager always to rise nearer to the full height of his vision if ever—perhaps helped forward by his own striving—the state of the world and of his own soul make that possible.

We have said that none save God may judge him in that exercise of conscience. But we must add the same warning about those whose consciences assure them that no leavening of the lump of civilization as we know it is now possible, and that violent revolution is the only way to win free course for a new spirit in the world. The stage may be reached in any social development where the evil is so firmly fixed and so pervasive that response to any kind of moral ideal is become impossible. Some revelations of the world sometimes described as Big Business arouse a wonder whether the commerce of Western capitalism has not reached that stage. In the body politic as in the physiological organism disease may go so far that hope lies no longer in the physician's drug but only in the surgeon's knife. The question whether it be so or not is one that cannot be answered by reference to general principles or ideal standards. But each must have those principles and standards before his mind as he frames his answer. Our task is to do the best we can; but our estimate of what is best must be reached by standards which still condemn it. Relative terms are absolute in their relations; whatever is best in the circumstances—relatively best—it is my absolute duty to do; yet judged by the absolute standard it is still condemned as sin. For all is sin which falls short of the glory of God.

These considerations apply with redoubled force to international politics. The Christian statesman and the Christian citizen should have before their minds the Kingdom of God and His Justice as the only standard of their conduct. But they must work with the material

to hand. Men do not love the highest when they see it; they are much more likely to repudiate it with disgust and to crucify or otherwise rid themselves of anyone who proclaims and embodies it. The preacher of the Gospel must preach it in its fullness and purity; but even he, when administering spiritual discipline, must seek out the course that will in fact win those who are entrusted to his care to obedience and loyalty, rather than endanger their spiritual growth by following only those methods which are ideal in the sense of being appropriate to the Redeemer of the world. Still more the politician, wrestling with problems not primarily of eternal destiny but of a temporal and indeed ephemeral balance of forces, some due to Christian impulse, some (probaby far more) to sheer self-seeking, must keep the vision clear before him, but pick with care and skill the path that actually will lead nearer to it, even though the course be not very direct.

In all this it is assumed that history, and our day to day activities, have eternal significance—that they "matter" to God. If they do not, then the idealist is at liberty to pursue his ideals without regard to the havoc that he causes on the way; but also, for the same reason, the cynic may pursue his course undeterred by any thought of the anger or the grief of God. Yet in repudiating the notion that the course of history is of no account for eternity, we must avoid the opposite error of supposing that eternity is either the sum total of history or (still worse) its culminating phase. We must rid ourselves completely of the Pelagian notion that we can "build" or "extend" the Kingdom of God, except so far as the proclamation of the Gospel may be the occasion of its extension through the opening of the hearts of men to the manifested love of God. It may perhaps be our task to prepare the way of the Lord; but He will come in His

own time. And when the Lord Christ comes it is not to crown our efforts by the establishment of the perfect co-operative commonwealth; it is to "put down all rule and authority and power," and so, having vanquished all enemies (the last is death), to become subject to the Father, "that God may be all in all." In other words, the goal of Christian hope is not any kind of social or political achievement, and its realization depends on the cancellation of that bond of mortality which is the prime condition of all our endeavours here.

Our task is not to construct the Kingdom, but to live in the conditions of this world as those who, by the grace of God through the redemption effected in Christ, are citizens of the Kingdom. That status is ours through Christ. "Our citizenship is in heaven." Yet we are not perfect in love. We "have received the first fruits of the spirit," yet still "wait for our adoption, the redemption of our body," and still find ourselves in a world "groaning and travailing" under the sentence of vanity or futility. Consequently our duty as Christians is at one and the same time to keep our eyes fixed on the eternal goal, and in these bewilderments of time and sin to think, each one for himself, how he may in fact, being a sinner, so act in a world of sinners, that he most effectively gives glory to God.

This will involve him in both risk and sacrifice, but they are not the same risk and sacrifice as are involved in immediate conformity to "ideal" standards. We may illustrate this from the overshadowing problem of the moment—the problem of peace and war. One type of Christian idealist holds that a Christian can never rightly take part in warfare. If he is very simple, he bases this view on texts; and then he has difficulty with the saying "He that hath no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one." If he is less simple than that, he

takes his stand on a supposed sacrosanctity of physiological life; and then he ought to be in difficulties about the martyrs; for to give life must be as wrong as to take it, if the preservation of it is an ultimate obligation. If the really sacred thing (as I believe) is the personal liberty of those whom God has made in His own image and for whom the exercise of liberty is the pre-condition for the persistence of the image though it may also be the means of defacing it, then it is only as a very last resort that life may be taken, for to take it is the utmost curtailment of liberty possible to man, while to give life may be the supreme manifestation of spiritual liberty. But on this ground it may be a positive duty to take life, for there may be occasions when that is the only way to preserve liberties more extensive than those curtailed by the act of killing.

But the idealist pacifist need not be one of the simple folk described. He may deliberately hold that warfare, however just its cause, always in fact does more harm than good, especially because of the brutal passions which it lets loose upon the world. Such a judgment cannot be met by argument, for it is an ultimate judgment of value. But it is to be noticed that it involves deliberately allowing an aggressor nation to "get away with it." That may be right, as being the lesser evil. But we are now in the realm of comparative judgments of value, not of absolute principles, and therefore the main point under discussion has been implicitly conceded.

Many Christians feel that so long as any nations are prepared to use armed force, a refusal to resist by force its use in aggression or violence is too like the hand-washing of Pilate. But those who take such a view are not committed to any mere surrender to popular passion. In order that force may be used only for the maintenance of Law, they must urge upon their fellow citizens a

policy which involves the abrogation of national sovereignty. For as long as every nation claims to be judge in its own cause, there can be no reign of Law among the nations. It is also true that the nations need a Tribunal of Equity to adjust the Law of Nations to the needs as well as to the possessive rights of nations; and for many this will also involve sacrifice. But the abrogation of national sovereignty must be asked of all nations; and none is ready to concede it. This is, in the judgment of many Christians, the first step towards securing the application to national communities of the command—Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

But this matter of Peace and War is here introduced as illustration only. The contention of this paper may be briefly summarized as follows: (1) The Christian is bound to apply the standards of his religion to every department of his conduct. (2) In doing this, he is bound to consider the probable effects of any course of action, and choose that which in its consequences is likely to promote the greatest conformity to those standards. (3) He has this obligation because he is called to live, not by the letter of any law or precept, but by a Spirit. (4) In considering the effects of his action he must take the widest possible survey and not limit his attention to those most immediately concerned on any occasion; and especially he must consider his special responsibilities, e.g., as politician or as man of business, or as Labour leader, the discharge of which is for him a primary obligation. (5) Having settled his course by these principles, he must be ready to incur personal sacrifice, and to call others voluntarily to join him in sacrifice, as he follows the course chosen.

And throughout he will remember that, though he must work and pray for the coming of the Kingdom "in earth as it is in heaven," that hope can, from the nature

of the case, never be perfectly fulfilled. For that hope includes fellowship with the children of God in all generations, which cannot be realized under conditions of mortality, and even so far as the Kingdom comes to fullness of actuality, the work has always to begin again as the generations pass and new citizens of the Kingdom are born, each infected and all infecting one another with the original sin which is self-centredness. Consequently in this world the Kingdom is actualized always as the Cross—as sacrifice, not barren indeed but also not securing the complete fulfilment of the hope for which it is made. Like our predecessors, we also, even though by God's help we win a good report on account of faith, must die without receiving the promises. Yet our strivings here have meaning for God, and they whose hearts with their treasure are in the eternal realm are those who do most to give to this temporal world the service which promotes its welfare as the ages pass and endows it with its deepest significance for eternity.

CHRISTIAN FAITH AND THE COMMON LIFE

by

REINHOLD NIEBUHR

THE CHRISTIAN FAITH AND THE COMMON LIFE

THE problem of the Christian faith and the common life is easily stated but not readily solved. The problem is to relate the moral ultimate of Christian faith, the law of love, to the facts and necessities of daily existence. This is a difficult problem because the law of love is not a law at all; and the common life of man in all its relationships requires the restraints of law. Love is an ideal which transcends all law; but the sinfulness of the human heart threatens the common life of man with anarchy if it is not restrained, if natural impulses are not brought under the discipline of accepted standards; if standards are not enforced by some kind of social will, stronger than the potentially recalcitrant will of the individual; and if methods of arbitration are not found for the inevitable conflicts of social will and interest between various members of the human community.

I. THE LAW OF LOVE

In order to understand the problem adequately, it is well to begin with a more careful analysis of the two facts which establish its dimension, the law of love and the fact of sin. The law of love is a law and yet not a law. It is a law in the sense that it states the basic requirement of the aggregate existence of humankind. A healthy social life is one in which every part, individual and collective, finds its rightful place in the harmony of the whole and serves the commonweal without coercion. The spring of its co-operative action must be an uncoerced goodwill. Sin may make coerced co-operation necessary, but coercion remains an evil even when it is necessary. The coerced will always breeds resentments

which introduce frictions into any established social harmony and threaten it with dissolution whenever the coercive force is relaxed. Furthermore, the necessity of coercive force always introduces injustice into human relations. Since power is wielded by sinful men, it is never applied with perfect impartiality. Social authority and force, whether that of a father in a family, or a government within a nation, or a hierarchy within a Church, is always to a greater or less degree corrupted by self-interest. The agent who has been endowed with force by the necessities of social life uses it partly for his own ends. Resentment against authority and force is, therefore, never merely the expression of egoistic impatience with social restraints. There is always an element of justified opposition to injustice in it. But whatever the relative virtues of rebels and governments, it is obvious that the social harmony achieved through coercion is always less than the best, and that its imperfections are not merely harmless deviations from the ideal. Every social harmony which falls short of perfect love has the seeds of anarchy and death in it. The commandment to love our neighbour as ourself is, therefore, not a mere counsel of perfection in the sense that it merely extends the logic inherent in the possibilities of human action until an ideal is projected which transcends all possibilities. The law of love is really the law of life. It is a basic requirement of human existence which men transgress at their peril. Every transgression disturbs and imperils the social harmony of human existence.

Yet the law of love is not a law. It is a norm but not an obligation. At least it is not an obligation which can be enforced. Every effort to enforce it negates it; for an enforced submission of the will to something other than itself, whether of the individual by society or the

sensible by the intelligible self (to use Kant's distinction), presupposes a conflict between the self and society, or the self and its higher self which real love would overcome. For it is of the very character of love that it desires the good freely and without compulsion. The law of love therefore presupposes a human personality which is not at war with itself, that is a sinless soul. Since, however, sin is a fact of all human existence, the law of love can only be stated in terms of an obligation. Thus the paradox in the simple commandment "Thou shalt love" (i.e. the paradox of stating a possibility as an obligation when the obligatory feature destroys it as a possibility) is a faithful expression of the basic paradox in all human morality. The fact that the obligation to love can be felt as an obligation is a refutation of all unduly rigorous conceptions of total human depravity. Whatever the reality of human sin, the human spirit is still able to recognize the validity of the laws of the Kingdom of God. They are not superimposed upon the moral life by supernatural revelation. They are rather transcendent possibilities implicit in all moral experience. Yet the fact of sin makes them impossibilities as well as possibilities. No one lives fully by the law of love. All human existence betrays the anarchy of the self against itself and against society. But though the perennial fact of sin makes it an impossibility it is not an irrelevant ideal because of its transcendence.

Love, said St. Paul, is the fulfilment of the law. Upon it, declared Jesus, hang the law and the prophets. Every moral law is an approximation of the law of love and has validity only in so far as the law of love is implicit in it. The law of love carries the logic of the moral life to its final conclusion. It distils the pure essence of morality out of a compound of the unconditioned and the expedient of which moral laws are compounded.

Thus laws of justice, taking sinful self-interest for granted, establish equitable divisions between the interest of the self and the interest of the other. They are, therefore, always in danger of throwing the aura of moral sanctity upon the sinful self-interest which they take for granted. They must consequently stand under the criticism of the law of love.

Every champion of justice must learn not to be perplexed by the perplexing words of condemnation spoken by Jesus to a seeker after justice: "Who has made me a divider between you?" This word of ultimate criticism must not dissuade him from seeking justice. Upon certain levels of life the requirements of justice are the highest imperatives. This paradox really contains the whole problem of the Christian faith and the common life. The problem is to establish tentative harmonies and provisional equities in a world from which sin cannot be eliminated and yet to hold these provisional and tentative moral achievements under the perspective of the Kingdom of God. In non-religious moralism, the second strategy is lacking. In consequence the moralism becomes infected with romanticism and self-righteousness. In Augustinian-Lutheran Christianity the relative requirements of moral standards are treated with a scant respect, and religion becomes, in consequence, too supramoral.

2. THE FACT OF SIN

The real dimension of the problem of faith and the common life is obscured in secular and in liberal Christian morality because there is no appreciation of the fact of sin. Failure to estimate the moral life in its total dimension of depth results in a reduction of the moral command to standards of prudential morality. Evil is consequently conceived as no more than lack of the prudence required

for the tentative agreement between self-interest and the larger interests. Sin can really be known only when life is analysed from the perspective of the law of love. Under this perspective it becomes apparent that every human action falls short of the requirements of the common life and that the defect in it is not merely a defect in the sense that it is not merely the lack of perfect appreciation of the interests of the whole. In every human moral act there is either an element of positive rebellion against God and against life in its total requirements, or a falling short of the highest possibility.

Before considering the positive element in human evil it must, however, be recognized that there are some merely negative elements in human wrong-doing. These elements never stand alone, so that it is not possible to ascribe some human actions to mere finiteness and others to sin. Every aspect of human finiteness is a temptation to the human spirit to transcend its finiteness by its own strength. Consequently some element of sin is always involved in every failure of the human imagination. Yet it is possible and necessary logically to isolate and define what is never isolated in human life.

The human spirit is embedded in nature. It may apprehend the unconditioned but it remains conditioned by the multifarious limitations of natural life. In nature life is related to life in narrow terms. We may feel a sense of obligation to all men but the obligation is thin and rational compared to the obligation we feel toward those who are related to us by blood and consanguinity. This obligation is, moreover, supported by natural impulses of paternal and filial affection. Beyond the immediate family group, larger communities of race, class, and nation claim the loyalty of the individual, partly because of an extended sense of blood relationship, partly by force of a natural gregariousness, and partly

because contiguity and direct contact reinforce the sense of obligation of life to life. In these primary and quasi-primary social relations the basis of all moral life is laid, through the fact that life is carried beyond itself and some kind of community is established. At the same time the narrow limits of these relations are a constant peril to the total human community. In them the devotion of the individual to the community is compounded with the natural will-to-live of the community itself into what has been termed "alteregoism." The social conflicts between the collective egoistic wills of various racial and national communities have become a more fruitful source of human misery than the conflicts between individuals.

It is true, of course, that the human mind relates the individual to larger areas of social cohesion than those created by social impulse. Paternal impulse may prompt a father to particular devotion toward the interests of his own child; but mind enlarges the field of moral obligation to include other children beside one's own. Reason has a larger range than natural impulse. Yet it always remains imbedded in the limitations of the organism in which it operates. Reason may discover the interests of others to which I feel myself under obligation as well as to my own; and the requirements of reason (the laws of logic) may insist that there are no rational grounds on which I can prefer my own interests to those of others. But I will prefer my own interests to those of others, not only because a natural egoistic impulse, not fully under the control of reason, prompts me, but also because the mind is not sufficiently clairvoyant to understand the interests of others as well as those of the self.

All human action is, therefore, conditioned by the imitations of the mind. The news of a famine in China

prompts a sense of obligation to the starving; but people act upon such an obligation only as long as the news is fresh. "Out of sight, out of mind." The peoples of Europe may feel a vague sense of obligation to the European community as such, but this sense of obligation cannot compete with the sense of obligation they feel to their several nations, since the latter is constantly supported by fresh experience and focussed by the organs and symbols which the nation uses to impress its reality upon the weak imagination. Thus the same mind which enlarges the area of human community also fails because of its natural limitations to create the community it envisages. From the perspective of the love commandment all limited human communities therefore stand under the gospel condemnation: "If ye love them that love you, what thanks have ye?"

Curiously enough, human reason is much quicker to fashion the technical instruments for a larger community than to prompt social attitudes which would clothe the mechanism of interdependence with the flesh and blood of social mutuality. This tendency has reached its climax, and probably a tragic climax, in modern civilization, in which the material needs of men are involved in a vast system of international communications but which fails to create the social mutuality necessary to support such a system. As a consequence, the technical interdependence threatens the modern community with a more intolerable fratricidal anarchy than anything known in human history.

The analysis, thus far, has dealt only with the negative aspects of human wrongdoing, the "things we have left undone that we ought to have done." It has sought to isolate the aspect of finiteness from the more positive element of human sin. It has seemed for the moment, therefore, to agree with the prevailing secular moralism

of the past century, which assumed that sin and ignorance could be equated and that the problems of human civilization could be solved by increasing rationality. But there is a more positive element in human evil than these assumptions imply. This positive element is the element of sin, in the stricter sense of the word. Every human action betrays not only finiteness and the limitations of a natural organism but the pretentious effort to deny the limitation and the hypocritical claim of having transcended what has not been transcended. The self never merely fails in comprehending the needs of others. It always seeks to comprehend them by interpreting them in terms consistent with its own needs. The failure of the mind to gain a universal vision always tempts it to substitute its partial prejudices for the universal values which it failed to achieve. This is the root of all cultural imperialism and of the moral pharisaism which judges other people and finds them wanting because they fall short, not of some absolute standard, but of the judge's standard.

It is, therefore, not ego-centricity which is sin, as is frequently assumed by modern theologians. Ego-centricity is a natural limitation of nature. Sin is expressed not in making the self the centre of the self, as in animal existence, but in the more spiritual enterprise of making the self the centre of the world. Sin is not a quality of nature but of the spirit. It is the pretension of finite nature, unwilling to accept its finiteness. It is the ambition of man, seeking to make himself God and being involved in rebellion against God as a consequence. It is the recurring tendency in all human culture and morality to make the partial, imperfect, contingent, and particular the criterion of value (Romans i. 18–32).

The socio-moral aspect of sin is most clearly revealed in imperialism and injustice. The religio-moral aspect

of sin is spiritual pride. The prophets rightly refrained from separating the two. Sin, to them, was both the "pride of Ephraim" and the injustice of the powerful. All spiritual pride leads to oppression and injustice because it tries to comprehend the whole of life from an inadequate centre and therefore destroys and oppresses what cannot be fitted into its narrow scheme. It tries to organize mankind by the laws of some imperial nation or group of nations (such as the imperialism of western nations in the rest of the world); it judges mankind from a partial perspective. It inflates the particular into the appearance of the universal, the contingent and finite into the semblance of the ultimate and infinite at the very moment when it pretends to subject the former under the dominion of the latter. It worships God as the infinite creator and judge of human life, but manages to suggest that the particular symbols used for the divine establish a special kinship between God and the inventors of the symbols. Thus every religious symbol is in intent a pointer toward the transcendent but in form it has the mark of a particular age and culture. The form always manages to acquire some effulgence from the aura of the divine in the intent of the symbol. Hence sacred canons, hierarchies, dogmas, and rituals become instruments of human pride and weapons of human imperialism.

The final sin is always a religious sin, for it expresses the unconscious pride of the human heart in an almost conscious pretension of divinity. Hence the absurdity of regarding religion, *per se*, as a guarantee of virtue. In all religion, even in religion in which man consciously seeks to submit himself to God, there is an element of sinful pretence, an effort to establish an exclusive claim upon God. No theologian was more conscious of the necessity of human contrition before God than Martin Luther; yet few theologians have spoken with such re-

ligious contempt of those who were thought to have rejected God because they did not accept Luther's theology. Perhaps we have the final symbol of the perennial character of human sin in the fact that theologies which preach humility and contrition can nevertheless be vehicles of human pride.

If human life cannot extricate itself from its pride in its final religious aspirations one can easily see why every moral and cultural enterprise is tainted with sin. In one sense, the most moral enterprise is the one which reveals sin most clearly. A life which rests in narrow and natural harmonies, close to its animal origins, which is neither cursed nor blest by the vision of the infinite and universal, is less sinful than the spirituality of a high culture in which imperialism and universalism are curiously mingled. Every modern nation with a vision of world peace also unconsciously assumes that it will be the organizing centre of such a peace. Even the Hebrew prophets managed to insinuate racial and national pride into their vision of the Kingdom of God. It was from Zion that the Kingdom would be governed.

There is, therefore, no level of human life or moral enterprise in which sin does not threaten life with anarchy. Increasing rationality does not overcome the peril. For every new level of rationality increases both the degree of social harmony and the peril of anarchy. Prophetic religion must keep the sinful element in every spiritual enterprise under the constant judgment of God. Perhaps that is the primary function of all high religion. But it is impossible to separate this function rigorously from the moral tasks of the common life, all of which have the object of checking the anarchy of sin even though the remedial action involves the agent in sin. The love commandment is not only an ultimate criterion of judgment upon all human actions which fall short of love. It is also

a guide for the approximations of justice and love which make up the woof and warp of everyday existence.

A religion which prompts men either to an ascetic withdrawal from the world in the hope of escaping the sins with which all socially responsible human actions are tainted, or a religion which contents itself with eschatological judgments upon the sinfulness of all common actions are equally truant to the obligation of religion to morality.

3. THE PROBLEMS OF THE COMMON LIFE

How then is the law of love with its absolute demand to be made relevant to a relative world, to a system of obligations intended to preserve relative harmonies and equities in a situation in which the facts of nature and the perils of sin divide the ultimate community of love into limited natural communities and conflicting and competing loyalties?

(*a*) The order of creation.

The attempted solution of this problem may well begin with a consideration of the relation of the love commandment to the limited communities of family, race, and nation created by the natural impulses of sex and gregariousness and the natural limitations of geography, i.e. the communities envisaged in the Lutheran conception of the "order of creation." The organic relations of life to life in the communities established by the forces of nature are at the same time inchoate expressions of the law of love and a threat to its dominion. This cannot be easily dissolved by the universalistic tendencies of rational morality as the eighteenth century imagined. Nor must they be treated with the unqualified reverence accorded them in the modern German theology which tries to give Christian validity to nationalistic impulses.

The spirit of love within a family community, for instance, is both relevant to and a threat against the Kingdom of God. Jesus could say of it "If ye then being evil know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more . . ."; but He could also say "Whoso loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me." Failure of the Christian faith to appreciate the love to which men are prompted by natural impulse, the love of paternal affection, of filial loyalty or patriotic devotion, as the raw stuff which may be transmuted into the AGAPE of the Kingdom of Grace, betrays it into a thin moralism. On the other hand failure to set the absolute demands of the Kingdom of God as a judgment over these partial loyalties destroys the prophetic element in religion and allows human morality to sink back into its animal origins. The God of Christian faith is not only the Creator but the Judge of the world. An undue religious reverence for the "order of creation" is particularly dangerous, because in human history the partial loyalties of the natural world always contain an element of sin which does not belong to the order of nature. The devotion of a man to his race is never expressed without a sinful contempt for and competition with other races. Thus Christian faith is in danger in Germany of using the concept of the "order of creation" to justify a sinful arrogance of the Aryan against the Jew, as Christian faith was used in nineteenth-century America to destroy what was prophetic in the attitude of Jeffersonian liberalism toward the negro.

The attitude of Christian faith toward the limited human communities of nature and history must, therefore, be dialectical. It must see in them both the promise of and a peril to the love of the Kingdom of God.

(*b*) Love and the natural law.

The world of nature and sin, of narrow loyalties and

sinful ambitions and corruptions, must stand under the challenge and the judgment of the law of the Kingdom of God. The law of love is both a challenge and a judgment. It is a challenge because there is no human situation in which love does not present possibilities of action higher than the conventional and traditional customs and habits of men. No form of paternal affection can, for instance, claim to have attained the highest degree of imagination, possible and necessary for the assertion of the type of affectionate authority, best suited for the discipline of a child. The love ideal is therefore not merely a transcendent impossibility which has no relevance to actual situations. There is no moral and social situation in which the love commandments does not present new possibilities of conduct. While the limitations of nature and the sin of egotism make it impossible for me to love the neighbour as the self, I can never use that final impossibility as an excuse for complacence toward the neighbour's life and interest. There are no exact limits to the degree of imagination with which I may enter into the needs and consider the interests of the neighbour. The love commandment is therefore always a challenge which stands vertically over every moral act and achievement. It defines the dimension, ending in a transcendent Kingdom of God, in which all moral actions take place.

But moral actions are subject not only to this "vertical" challenge but also to "horizontal" ones. Human life is under obligation not only to perfect every moral attitude in the direction of perfect love, but to extend it in the direction of universal love. A Christian feels a tension not only to make his family life, in a measure, into a symbol of the Kingdom of God but also to extend the loving relations which prevail in the family to life which is not bound to him by natural consanguinity.

He lives under the challenge: "If ye love them that love you, what thanks have ye?"

The moral obligation to extend the area of love, to bring the life and the interests, which on the level of nature are in conflict with his life and interests, into terms of mutuality with him is one which cannot be fulfilled without mediation between the love commandment and the selfishness, the conflict and oppression of a sinful world. Love is not an immediate possibility in the larger and more indirect and collective relations of life. It is an illusion of liberal Protestantism that the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount can be made immediately applicable to these relationships. No amount of moral suasion, or for that matter divine grace, can overcome the limitation of my mind which fails to grasp the needs of a man in China as clearly as it grasps the needs of a man with whom I have daily contact; nor will they completely overcome my sinful complacency toward this limitation. Orthodox Christianity was therefore quite right in establishing a more relative moral ideal than that of love; the ideal of justice as the guiding criterion of political relations. It was right also in conceiving this ideal as a requirement of the natural law and in defining the natural law as primarily constituted of the obligations conceived by human reason. It is perfectly futile to seek to discredit the conception of the natural law (as is the tendency in modern suprarational theology) as being unduly dependent upon Stoicism or Aristotelianism or, in the modern situation, upon Marxism. The fact that the Christian faith borrows from extant systems of rational morality in elaborating its theories of compromise is merely indicative of a basic requirement of Christian ethics. Since the very genius of gospel ethics is that it makes no compromises and offers no philosophy or strategy for dealing with the relative requirements of a sinful

world, it becomes necessary to supplement gospel ethics with some strategy for dealing with the immediate requirements, the day-to-day necessities of a world in which the anarchy of sin must be checked sufficiently to allow some degree of human co-operation.

Now the fact is that the force of human egoism is such that large ventures in social cohesion are not possible on a purely voluntary basis. A degree of coercion is necessary to maintain them. Hence the necessity of government. Furthermore, the disproportions of power, priestly, military, and economic, inevitably make for injustice if those who suffer from the exactions of power do not resist injustice. One of the most unfortunate errors in the orthodox conception of the natural law was that it unduly justified the sanctity of government and unduly disapproved of resistance to authority. The governor and the rebel are both necessary instruments of political justice. Without the one there would be anarchy; without the other legitimate government degenerates into tyranny. Failure of orthodox Christianity to understand the second peril as well as the first has betrayed the wholesome realism of orthodox Christianity into a pessimistic disapproval of political rebellion and prompted a regrettable alliance between the Church and the forces of political reaction.

Naturally the possibilities of injustice which lurk in the wielding of power, as well as the possibilities of vindictive anarchy which may be unloosed by the rebels against government, and the possibilities of violence which may result from the pressures and counter-pressures of political life are possibilities which must, from time to time become actualities. There must therefore be no illusion about the degree of moral perfection attainable in and through the requirements of the natural law. The natural law deals with a world of sin and arrests

but does not overcome its anarchy. The peace of the world, said St. Augustine, is based on strife. The world's equilibria are tentative.

It must not be assumed, however, as is the case in much orthodox theology, that the coercion and resistance allowed and justified by the natural law have the mere negative function of arresting anarchy. The economic and political arrangements of society do something more positive than arrest evil and prevent anarchy. They are the bony skeleton which bear the more organic elements in society. They are the necessary mechanism which is involved in all organism. They have the purpose of extending the range of organic relations to wider areas than would be possible if organic elements in society did not have their support. Thus an adequate scheme of taxation not only forces men to conform to a standard of justice to which they may be disinclined but also helps them to meet obligations (toward the unemployed for instance) to which they may be inclined, but for the fulfilment of which they lack the proper instruments. An adequate mechanism of the economic life not only checks egoism but furnishes the instruments by which the human desire for community in work and production may realize itself. It is one of the illusions of liberal moralism, both secular and religious, that these mechanisms of society are unimportant, compared with the right moral or religious attitudes among men. This view is as senseless as would be the opinion that tuberculosis of the spine offers no peril to the human organism as long as the head and heart are healthy. The widely held utopian dreams of modern radicalism about the possibility of eliminating all social evil by a new social and economic mechanism are understandable reactions to ages of both feudal and bourgeois indifference to the importance of the material basis of social justice.

(*c*) The natural law and the ideal of equality.

Ideals of justice are very relative to the contingencies of time and place, to arbitrary disposition of powers and privileges which may exist at any moment in which an attempt at justice is made. If the negro and "poor white" tenant farmers of the southern American States, who now live in virtual peonage, more grievous than slavery, could achieve a wage of a dollar per day, that would be hailed as a triumph of justice among them, though their poverty would still be greater than that of many unemployed living on the dole. No mechanism of justice could eliminate the contingencies of nature to such a degree that the citizens of a nation with few natural resources could acquire a living standard as high as that of more richly blessed nations. Every attainment of justice is relative to the arbitrary and contingent factors of natural inequalities and social heritages which condition it and which are only partly overcome in it.

The question therefore arises whether there is any regulative principle by which the merits of these partial achievements in justice may be judged. The answer is that there is only one such principle, the principle of equality A higher justice always means a more equal justice. Since all human morality rests upon the presupposition of the value of all human life and since there are no *a priori* principles by which the value of one life may be preferred to that of another, the problem of dividing the privileges of common human enterprises can only be solved by implicit or explicit standards of equality. That is why equality is an ideal principle in both Stoic and Christian conceptions of the natural law.

It is true, of course (though modern rationalists are inclined to deny it) that equality is never attainable. That is why the distinction between an absolute and a relative natural law in both Stoic and Christian thought

is necessary. The absolute natural law is what reason requires abstractly. The relative natural law is what reason is able to achieve under the conditions of human sin and the contingencies of nature. Perfect equality is never possible. The contingencies of nature which arbitrarily benefit some men more than others cannot be completely eliminated. Furthermore the requirements of social organization demand that privileges shall be unequal where social function requires special privilege for its proper performance. It is furthermore inevitable that the social power which accompanies special function should be sinfully used to arrogate special privileges beyond the necessities of the function performed. Thus inequality is growing in Russia not only because social organization requires it but because unequal social and political power gradually relativizes revolutionary ideals. It is also probable that men cannot be prompted to the fullest use of their capacities merely by the satisfaction which creative work as such gives the worker, particularly since much work has to be done which is too uninteresting to offer great satisfactions. Consequently, it is probable that human societies will always be under the necessity of encouraging to special diligence by offering special rewards.

Equality is, therefore, a law of justice but a transcendent one. It differs from love, which transcends all law, in the sense that it is a law, though a transcendent one. But it is not an irrelevant ideal and it is not completely transcendent. It suggests actual possibilities of justice in every social situation. It was the mistake of Christian orthodoxy to relegate it to a sphere of complete transcendence and irrelevance. The equality of Christians before God was recognized but that equality had no social significance except possibly in the Church in the first centuries. It offered no challenge to slavery, and though it made the conscience uneasy in regard to the extrava-

gances of poverty and wealth in which society existed, it saw no possibility of mitigating the inequalities by a basic social reorganization. The fact is that Christian pessimism made the distinction between the relative and the absolute natural law so sharp that it removed the absolute law as an influence upon Christian social ethics and gave it only a religio-moral significance. The consequence was that justice was unduly enslaved to the contingent historical factors of the societies in which it expressed itself, particularly to the patriarchal conceptions of feudal society. In Christian orthodoxy religious pessimism overwhelmed the prophetic moral tension in religion. If moral tension remained it could express itself only in terms of individual charity. The Christian might feel himself under obligation to supplement the imperfect justice of society by acts of kindness and philanthropy, but he did not feel himself obliged to challenge the basic structure of society in the name of justice. Justice without the regulative principle of equality merely becomes a sanctification for whatever relative and uneven justice may have been achieved in a given period of history.

In the same way equality without the higher principle of love as a principle of judgment becomes a form of legalism in which a relative equilibrium in society is mistaken for the perfect harmony of life with life.

How completely a certain type of orthodoxy is able to destroy every vestige of Christian tension upon the moral life may be illustrated by one of the criticisms of this paper submitted by a German Lutheran theologian. In it the Kingdom of God and the law of love are set in purely diametrical opposition to the world in such a way that both rational and Christian principles cease to be regulative in the life of the world. The law of love is merely a judgment upon the world and points toward

the hour of its final redemption. The consequence of removing the law of love into a position of pure transcendence in which it has no relevance to the life of the world, is a social ethic in which Machiavellian politics and Darwinian sociology are blended into a pessimistic compound. The critic writes: "Love to the weak and the sick is in opposition to the fundamental law of human society which consists in natural selection, so that in the end the healthy and strong element is preserved—while the sick and the weak go to the wall.—A victory of the weak and the sick would be absolutely dangerous for the existence of society.—Human society is built upon the fact that the guilty are punished according to the standard of justice and lose their honour. All sentimental weakening of the fundamental law of justice revenges itself upon society.—Human society is based upon the 'friend enemy' relationship. The reverse side of every human community is its conflict with and enmity toward others. Jesus reckons with this fact that everyone has enemies.—But He proclaims the coming kingdom in which there will be no more enmity. Therefore He commands His disciples to love their enemies as a testimony to God and the fundamental law of His kingdom.—Since Christian love witnesses against the world for the Kingdom of God, which He alone has created and into which He will one day transform the world, it also serves the world, since it knows that it is not our task to alter the world or to improve it, but only to maintain it in justice and peace until the Day of Jesus Christ. It does not serve the world with the bad conscience of those who feel compelled to accept a compromise but the good conscience of those who in the repose of faith do not interfere with the work of God but who confine their energies to the discharge of their earthly duty which God has laid upon them."

It is, perhaps, a proof of the difficulty of the oecumenical task which faces the Christian Church if I bluntly declare that if I thought for a moment that the Christian gospel meant what is implied in these words, I would prefer not to be a Christian. In such an interpretation, Christian eschatology becomes the source of moral complacency. One accepts all the relative injustice of the world as justice, regarding it in the same breath as both God-ordained and as doomed to destruction. Many a secularist has truer instincts for the moral realities than this complacency. The standards of justice which are here regarded as God's ordinances for a sinful world are in fact also realities of injustice which continually doom the world to destruction and anarchy. And there are always higher possibilities of both justice and love through which the anarchy and the sin of the world might be mitigated. It happens, for instance, not to be true that a society helps the weak and sick only at its peril. Failure of a society to help the weak and sick might create a source of infection for society, much more dangerous than the alleged danger of the victory of the weak over the strong. In the same manner, as pointed out by an anonymous Roman Catholic critic of this same paper, the punishment of the criminal by the state does not proceed by some absolute standard of justice. The state is always less than just by being no more than just. The word of Christ "let him who is without sin cast the first stone" is a commandment out of the Kingdom of God in the sense that it will never destroy the necessity of punishment in a sinful world. But it is also a word which suggests more imaginative and truly just treatment of criminals. Any judge who seeks the aid of psychiatric specialists to understand the causes of the criminal's wrong-doing and thus to mete out punishment with an eye to his reformation is closer to the Kingdom of God than this

theological pessimism. In the same way it is wrong to regard the "friend-enemy" relationship between nations as absolutely normative even for a sinful world. It is true, of course, that conflict cannot be eliminated from the world. But it is also true that conflict is constantly accentuated precisely because men do not regard these conflicts with an uneasy conscience. The counsel to love our enemies can hardly refer to a Kingdom of God "in which there will be no more enmity." These words have meaning only if the Kingdom of God both transcends and is relevant to the world. Any decent statesman who strives honestly to overcome misunderstandings and to resolve conflicts, any leader of social life who explores the possibilities of larger mutuality and seeks to be a "peacemaker," even if the peace of the world is no more than an armistice, is closer to the Kingdom of God than this kind of pessimism. The previously mentioned Roman Catholic critic makes the following observation upon this pessimism with which I would like to associate myself. "Christian love and justice do not exclude each other but love transcends justice.—It is true that frequently the friend-enemy relationship prevails, but a political strategy which rests only upon this principle would end in a catastrophe. Sin never belongs to the nature of things, not even in this sinful world, and that may be ascertained by the fact that the triumph of sin leads to annihilation even in the temporal order and proves itself thereby to be contrary to nature."

It is a dangerous theology in other words which does not recognize how dialectically the Kingdom of God is related to the sinful world in every moment of existence. offering both judgment and a more excellent way in consideration of every problem of justice. Failure to recognize this fact leads such a theology to the baneful acceptance of any justice which the state may declare

as just "because God has given the state the task of administering justice in the common life."

In view of this type of Christian pessimism and the consequent moral character of the politics and social ethics which it sanctions, it becomes the more important to understand, as it becomes easier to appreciate, the prophetic element in passion for justice in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century moralism. Against a religion which regards distinctions between more or less imaginative justice as insignificant from the standpoint of the Kingdom of God, though the lives and welfare of millions may depend upon these relative distinctions and achievements, this secular passion for justice restores an element which belongs to the Christian religion. It is a tragedy of history that this element had to be asserted in opposition to Christian pessimism, just as it is tragic that modern orthodoxy, seeking to correct the utopian illusions of Marxism, does not have the humility to discover the element of truth in this new revolt against injustice, even while it is correcting utopian error.

For this reason the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century passion for justice, conceived by secular moralism and championed in defiance of orthodox Christianity, must be regarded as a necessary restoration of an element in prophetic religion, even if it had to express itself in defiance of orthodox Christianity. It is, in fact, one of the tragedies of history that it was forced to this defiance. It is equally tragic when modern orthodoxy, seeking to correct the illusions, particularly the utopian illusions. of both liberal and Marxian secularism, attacks the element of truth and virtue in modern secularism as well as the utopian error. It is maintained, particularly in German theology, that the ideal of equality does violence to the organic character of human existence; that it fails to recognize the fact of sin and that its ration-

alism is incompatible with Christian faith. All of these charges are essentially false, though they contain a modicum of truth. The ideal of equality does no violence to the organic aspects of human existence when conceived as a regulative principle. Men and women are not equal by nature, for instance. There may be a rationalistic feminism which assumes that they are. But the illusions of such rationalism must not beguile us from the recognition of the fact that the difference between men and women tends to result in various forms of male autocracies in both the organization of the family and the state which cannot be accepted with equanimity, and which must be challenged by a moral obligation which is bound to use the idea of equality as its principle of criticism. Nor does the fact that sin corrupts every ideal of equality in actuality effect the legitimacy of the ideal. No human justice is ever perfect; yet no imperfection can be regarded as inevitable. It must be challenged and therefore stands under the criticism of the ideal of equality.

The idea that equality is too rationalistic to be compatible with Christian faith implies that Christian faith can dispense with the resources of reason in constructing an adequate social morality. Faith can no more dispense with reason in dealing with the details of a social ethic than it can dispense with logic in elaborating a total world view, or with science in analysing the detailed facts of human experience. Neither the logical nor the analytical elements of reason are capable of elaborating either a world view or an ethic without the presuppositions and foundations which faith supplies. Nor are they able to complete an ethical structure. The love commandment transcends both the requirements and the understanding of reason.

Reason can do no more than synthesize the given

forces of a human situation into some kind of harmony. In individual ethics it must therefore either regard the momentary harmony between self-interest as ultimate (as in utilitarianism) or it must seek to subject the recalcitrance of egoism under the demands of reason's universal law (as in Kantianism). In the first case, it is bound to overlook the basic and permanent contradiction between self-interest and social interest: and in the second case it must regard the self-contradiction of the human spirit (as expressed in the conflict between the intelligible and the sensible self) as normative. Christianity is therefore right in rejecting purely rational ethics; but wrong when tempted to deny the validity of the rational contribution to ethics. It is just as wrong when it does this as when a wooden orthodoxy spoils the myths of a religious faith by interpretating them as scientifically true. Christian faith must provide both the foundations for the edifice of a social ethic and the minarets for its superstructure. But if there are to be ordinary rooms in the house for day to day existence, the horizontal and diagonal construction by which the various rooms and floors of the house are supported must be supplied by the sober estimates of an engineering intelligence. The dimension of an ethical system are in the realm of art; and art is the form of faith. But the details of an ethical system have the same relation to the outlines set by faith as has the engineering of the architect to the art of the architect.

There can be no social ethic for the common life without the contribution of reason. It is important in a day in which the liberalism of the Enlightenment restored an element of prophetic social ethics which Christianity had lost; and yet falsified the ethical issues by its rationalism, to understand both the contribution and the limitation of reason in the field of a Christian social ethic.

That contribution can be dispensed with only if the effort to construct a Christian social ethic is entirely disavowed and Christian faith is content to allow the love commandment to judge but not to guide the relative moral necessities and possibilities of human existence.

(*d*) The Kingdom of God and the natural law.

It is the mistake of secularism, which restored equal justice as a regulative principle of social ethics, to imagine that equal justice can become the final principle of an ethical system. This is to disregard the total dimension of human existence, outlined by sin on the one hand and love on the other. Equality is a law which cannot be realized because of sin and finitude. Therefore Christianity must substitute realism for the utopian illusions of liberalism and radicalism. But on the other hand the principle of equality is only a temporary expedient of ethics. Therefore Christian faith must set it under the principle of love which is the fulfilment of all law. Equal justice is a law; and being a law it takes the order of nature for granted and remains within the order of nature. It seeks to bring the various forces of natural life, the warring impulses within an individual, and the competing interests in a society into a stable equilibrium. The more perfect the equilibrium the greater and the more stable the peace of the society. But its peace cannot be a permanent peace; for it presupposes conflict between forces, friction between which it has momentarily arbitrated. Every new emergence of vital capacity in any area of society will disturb the equilibrium. Equality may be the approximation in the realm of law of the principle of love. It is such an approximation because the principle of the equal affirmation of all life is closest to the ideal of sacrificial love, in which each life is subjected to the necessities of life as such. Yet equality is only an approximation of love. The ideal of love fulfils and transcends

all law. It fulfils it in the sense that it completes what every high moral law implies. It transcends it in that it presupposes a harmony of life with itself and with all life which man in history never realizes. The gospel commands are therefore not simply applicable imperatives of the moral life. The self-assertion of natural man and the imperial will-to-power of sinful man (i.e. original sin as well as natural finitude) frustrate the realization of perfect love in history.

The gospel commands are therefore in the realm of the Kingdom of God. But the Kingdom of God is not simply trans-historical. It is involved in every moment of history. It is a clue to the fact that every moment of history is a moment of judgment. For it reveals the law of life which life defies and for the defiance of which life is destroyed. But it is also a revelation of mercy and grace in human history. It reveals the infinite possibilities under which all human actions take place. Every deed of sacrifice, every genuine martyrdom, and every act of voluntary vicariousness is a symbol of these possibilities. Catholic Christianity is right in adding the lives of the saints to the revelation of the gospel as inspirations of the Kingdom of God. It is wrong, however, in nominating specific saints for its spiritual pantheon and in according them moral credit for what they have done. Human motives are too mixed and the purest deed too tainted with sin to justify these judgments upon men. In one sense it is true that there are not saints but that there is saintliness in human life. For there is no one without sin in human history; but the annals of history fortunately abound in deeds of heroism, loyalty, and charity which remind us of the possibilities of moral action and the resources of divine grace available even in a sinful world. The love commandment is, in short, immediately relevant to every moral action. Every moral action stands under

an infinite series of higher possibilities It was the mistake of Protestant orthodoxy not to recognize that fact and to remove the love commandment into a sphere of complete transcendence. But the love commandment is never simply relevant to historic action. For man, who insinuates egoism in ever more subtle forms into even the most charitable actions, the love commandment must remain an unattainable ideal, in which he delights after the inward, but knows that there is a law in his members which wars against the law that is in his mind.

The dialectical relation between the Kingdom of God and the world as presented in this chapter must be maintained against a Kingdom-world dualism on the one hand and naturalism on the other. A naturalistic critic of the position in America writes: "This law of love is nothing but an ideal. It is not actually at all but only a possibility. Now the difference between 'rational moralism' and religion lies right here. Lofty rational moralism is giving supreme devotion to the highest moral ideal. Religion is committing yourself to the power of an actuality. An ideal is a mere possibility which we are striving to bring into existence. It does not exist at all. The author makes plain that he does not mean anything in existence when he speaks of this moral ultimate the law of love."

The answer to this criticism is that in the Christian conception love is neither a mere possibility nor yet an actuality. Nor is God either a possibility or an actuality. God is reality and not actuality. God is not existence but the ground of existence. The law of His creation is love. Love is not a mere possibility, but the law of life. Yet it is negated by sin in historic existence. Both its basic character and its denial in history are perfectly expressed in the Johannine gospel. "The world was made by Him but the world knew Him not. He came unto

His own and His own received Him not." In these brief words the whole basic paradox of the Christian view of the world is expressed. The love as revealed in Christ is not some ultimate possibility of an eternal existence beyond this world. It lies at the very foundation of our world. But on the other hand man is alienated from this law of his existence, not because he is temporal but because he is sinful. Man makes himself God and thus confuses and distorts life (Romans i. 18–32). Into the mystery of this sin we cannot here enter. It may suffice to say that man is tempted to it precisely because he is both finite and yet a child of God with capacities for the infinite (Romans i. 20). In this situation he is constantly tempted to make himself absolute and eternal, rather than to seek the eternal creator of his existence. Of this sin the Christian gospel makes him aware. In the contrition of this awareness and in the knowledge of the true situation, revealed in the Cross, it is always possible for man to make the Kingdom of God the norm of his behaviour rather than to accept the distorted world as the norm. In that sense the love of the Kingdom is always a possibility. On the other hand the acceptance of the norm does not guarantee its realization. Even the redeemed man remains under the law of sin. There is, therefore no perfect redemption in purely moral terms as the American critic assumes. But this exposition of the matter assumes the fact of "original sin." This doctrine of the Church is either explicitly rejected or implicitly denied in wide circles of American Christianity. This paper is not the place to argue this point. One can only conclude by asserting that the presupposition of "original sin" in this exposition of the relation of the gospel to the common life is, in the opinion of the author, not merely a traditional doctrine of the Church but a key to the actualities of human behaviour, obscured in most liberal versions of Christianity.

THE LAW OF NATURE AND SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

by

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I. THE QUESTION OF THE LAW OF NATURE

THE fact that the oecumenical enquiry into the Church's responsibility in the sphere of social ethics has been confronted by the problem of the Law of Nature, is due in the first instance to reasons of a historical nature. For it is common to the ecclesiastical tradition of all the Christian confessions that the question of the basis and standard of secular law and of secular institutions in general is without exception answered by a reference to the Law of Nature, however differently the idea and content of the Law of Nature may be conceived by the confessions. When, therefore, the Church turns its attention to what it has to say to present-day problems of social ethics, it will have first to come to terms with the answer given in its tradition. And there is the additional fact that in Western civilisation, right into the nineteenth century, the philosophy of the Law of Nature has had decisive influence upon social development. But these historical reasons could not be decisive for our contemporary consideration of the problems of social ethics were it to turn out that the doctrine of the Law of Nature is not able to give to our present-day questions the answers we need. It is, therefore, primarily the necessities of our actual situation which make us raise the question of the Law of Nature just at this time.

(*a*) The Church has its specific task in the proclamation of the Gospel of the future Kingdom of God which has drawn near to us in Jesus Christ and calls us to faith and obedience. Whether as Law or as Gospel, the Word of God which the Church preaches is directed to the com-

munity of Jesus Christ, i.e. to each individual human being in so far as it calls him into that community, not, however, to the social structures which organise and maintain this world. Nor can the requirement of the Law be separated from the Gospel call to faith addressed to the individual. The Church has only an indirect relation to the organisations of secular society. Its aim is to preach to the world that redemption which lies in a new, God-given world; but it cannot be its primary mission to organise, maintain, or improve this world. Of course by the mere fact that it is there the Church will always have a great contribution to make to the maintenance of the natural order, but this will never be the specific subject of its preaching and work. So that it was quite clear from the beginning that the organisation and maintenance of human society in this world is not committed by God to the Church itself, but to certain earthly organising powers, which it therefore recognised as having received their mandate from God. At the same time the Church was aware that the aim of these secular institutions was not the realisation of God's eternal Kingdom which it itself preaches, but rather the carrying out of an entirely this-worldly task. So the idea of a Law of Nature presented itself to the Church as a means by which it distinguished the norm given to these secular institutions from the supernatural, divine law of God's Kingdom, and yet at the same time conceded to those institutions their relatively divine authority, and under certain circumstances could remind those institutions of their God-appointed task. Thus, the concept of a Law of Nature seems to-day particularly adapted to preserve the distinction between Church and State, God's Kingdom and the world, and yet at the same time to subject secular institutions to a divine norm instead of handing them over to human caprice.

(*b*) Christianity does not live isolated in the world; in all spheres of life it has to collaborate with non-Christians, whose life and action are governed by purely human world-views. And Christians collaborate with non-Christians in the development of social life, marriage, and the family, state and nation. Is there a common basis in norms, standards and ends for this political and social collaboration, as there quite obviously is in the scientific realm? For without a common basis an all-embracing activity for the betterment of society is impossible. As there is, in the nature of the case, no common ground in the sphere of religious faith, the question arises whether it is not to be found at least in that of morality and law.

In regard, then, to the Law of Nature, the Church has to face the question whether, as itself entrusted with God's revelation, it will legitimise as God's Will certain norms which are given to us by natural knowledge, whether it is its service of love to bring to man's mind that Will of God which is written for him in the realities of his life or not.

2. CRITICISM OF THE CONCEPTION OF A LAW OF NATURE

The idea of a Law of Nature does not arise out of Scripture, but is pre-Christian. And even in the new form which Christianity gave it, the doctrine has never quite been able to repudiate this heathen and pre-Christian origin. So that in the conception of a Law of Nature we are not dealing with an idea of reason, but with a very complex historical entity; it has roots in the past which must be known if one is to understand and judge it. To this it must be added that the idea is not a simple one, but has gone through many changes in the course of history, according as the rational and extra-Christian, or the Biblical and Christian elements predominated. Setting aside non-essential differences, we shall have to distinguish among

the uses to which this idea has been put by the Church, between the conceptions of the Law of Nature entertained in the ancient Church, in Thomist Scholasticism, at the Reformation, and in Rationalism. Of these only the Rationalist and Thomist conceptions play any part in the present, while in the case of the Reformation view, we have to ask nowadays whether the Reformers, apart from Melanchthon, did not interpret the thought of a Law of Nature so definitely in the sense of the Biblical idea of law that the designation "Law of Nature" scarcely applies.

The idea of a Law of Nature is a product of Greek philosophy and not to be separated from its idea of nature and the cosmos. The latter arose out of the philosophical doctrine of the Being which abides eternal amid the change of phenomena, of the unconditioned which underlies all conditioned realities, and of the eternal order of things. For Greek philosophy, this Being, which is independent of all change and at rest within itself, is Nature, and the eternal order of nature is the Law of Nature (*Naturgesetz*).

The Law of Nature (*Naturrecht*) is the specifically divine law as contrasted with the merely human, the original law as contrasted with the one which has been vitiated by human guilt, the eternal as contrasted with what is limited in time, the universal as contrasted with the particular and statutory, the rational as contrasted with the arbitrary. The idea of the Law of Nature thus reveals itself to be a view of law which corresponds to a pantheistic philosophical religion, as it received its logical formulation in the Stoa. Of course, unless all positive legislation was to be set aside at the outset in favour of the Law of Nature, a distinction had to be drawn here between the original Law of Nature in the primitive state and that form of it which was adapted to present conditions in which that harmony had been destroyed.

If Christian theology since the Apologists, following in this the example of Judaism, and later of canon law as well, took over the idea of the Law of Nature, its aim in so doing was merely to defend the earthly sphere as God's creation against any dualistic devaluation of the natural order. At the same time it had the apologetic aim of showing that the law given by God to the creation was known also to the heathen. Further, the Stoic theory of a fall from the original natural state of mankind could be connected without difficulty with the Biblical thought of the Fall. Yet the Church could not prevent Natural Law, originally interpreted in the light of what is meant by law in the Bible, from asserting itself in its genuine heathen and pantheistic sense against this interpretation. That was especially the case in Scholasticism, where the Stoic conception of the Law of Nature established a connection with the Aristotelian view of the cosmos as a series of grades of being interrelated teleologically. "Nature" came now to be the term not merely for the universal in contrast with the historical, the original in contrast with what sin had corrupted, what belonged to the divine creation in contrast with the human, but at the same time for the grade of being characteristic of the earthly in contrast with the supernature of the heavenly. Above all, the Greek ontology of Nature as a self-existing being, hampered the development of the Biblical thought of creation, so that even to this day Catholic theologians do not understand the difference between the Greek conception of nature and of the cosmos and the Biblical idea of creation.

The Thomist idea of the Law of Nature follows closely the Greek conception of nature and the cosmos, presupposing the world as a self-existing being which in virtue of its inherent cosmic law is organised teleologically with reference to an ultimate world-end. The eternal law of

the universe is the means by which Providence leads creation to its goal. The eternal law gives to each individual creature its partial goal within the framework of the whole cosmos, and at the same time its tendency to the attainment of that goal. The eternal law certainly exists independently of the world as a divine purpose and institution in God Himself; but the world is so made, that it attains its goal of itself, if it does but follow the law implanted within it. The eternal law of God as the world-law immanent in creation is the law of nature which, however, in order that it may lead to its eternal goal, needs to be completed by the "divine law" communicated by God. Here we see quite clearly that two heterogeneous elements are bound up together: the Biblical conception of creation, at once limited and completed by eschatology, and the idea of the cosmos in late Greek philosophy. But these are mutually exclusive: the thought, pantheistic in its origin, of an eternal law immanent in the world cannot be united with the Biblical doctrine of creation. For Biblical faith, creation is no clockwork machine created by its master and running of itself, in accordance with the mechanism given to it. God, as Creator, is He who brought the world into existence out of nothing, and now each moment maintains it in existence, so that no leaf can fall from a tree without God's doing. No doubt creation has its organisation and the laws which prevail in it are constant; but this constancy does not lie in the creation itself, but remains within the range of God's freedom, for it is His pleasure that the world should run its course by these constant laws. It is the constancy of the divine will. As created beings could not exist one moment without God's free decisions, so the world does not reach its goal in virtue of its immanent laws, but by God's free gift: creation has its unity and order not in itself, but in the Creator who holds it in being and gives it its order. God has not abrogated

His Providence in favour of an immanent world-order; the creation has no self-sufficing being and no self-existing organisation, but its existence and organisation rest in the personal will of a God who is free to act and create as He will. All this is expressed by our belief in the Creator of heaven and earth, and can as little be reconciled with the Aristotelian view of God as *prima causa* as with the Stoic idea of an immanent law of the universe. This means that the Christian faith in God as Creator negates at the outset the theological and cosmological bases of the Thomist conception of the Law of Nature.

In the same way, what is meant in the Bible by the divine law leads to a rejection of the idea of the Law of Nature. The equation of a "cosmic law" with the Will of God revealed in the divine law, was rendered easier by the ambiguity which attaches to the word *lex* and to the German *Gesetz*, but which does not arise with the Hebrew *Torah*. The idea of a Law of Nature and the scholastic idea of the *lex eterna* are alike in taking law as an order and meaning inherent in things, in virtue of which those things are arranged in the significant relation of means and end. On this view, the "law of nature" consists in a graduated series of purposive relations. The law, therefore, even if it originated with a will which sets itself ends, is throughout related to something, i.e., to an end which lies outside of the person setting himself ends. But it is otherwise with the law of God, as the Bible shows. God calls men to Himself; that constitutes both the form and the content of the divine law. God's command and the content of that command are one. But God does not call man to some particular thing he has to do, an end which lies outside God, but to surrender himself as a total personality to the divine love. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind" (Deut. vi. 5). The will which requires this

is therefore not simply directed to a certain end which a man is to take up into his will, but to himself as a person and to his relation to God, *in which* he affirms God's Will, and to this person in his totality, not simply in as much as he has a will directed towards ends. The same end can be affirmed from diverse motives, out of different relations to the one who assigns the end. Between God's person and man's there is only an Either-or, either love or enmity. This kind of law therefore applies to persons and not to things. It is related to persons in two respects; in the first place, because it is addressed to the whole human personality, and in the second, because it does not call a man to any definite action nor to the attainment of any definite end, but to surrender to God as a person, and recognition of His sovereignty and Godhead, just as God's love to man does not merely take cognisance of and implement some definite aim that man has, but gives Himself as a person that we may enter into fellowship with Him. Of course, the love which God's law requires of us, apart from words such as those of prayer, can only express itself in deeds, and that is why the Old Testament commandment to love God is associated with a number of individual commandments. But these particular commandments do not have the love of God as an end to which they are subordinated, but themselves constitute this commandment to love God, worked out in terms of the concrete historical circumstances. Their fulfilment is, therefore, purposeless if it does not arise out of love for God. The fulfilment of particular commandments is always ambiguous, as it can arise out of rebellious human self-assertion against God just as much as out of love for Him. Besides, God's law does not assign material ends or the action which expresses love to Him; such action, even in the earthly sphere, has reference to persons, to one's neighbour. He who acts in accordance with God's

law does not fulfil certain definite regulations as to things he must do, but serves his neighbour. Love gives direction to action by relating it to the neighbour, but love is an end in itself. And love to one's neighbour does not have love to God as the end it is to serve, but it is itself love to God put into practice towards one's neighbour. In short, God's law, as love of God and of one's neighbour, and the Aristotelian scheme of ends, on which the Thomist conception of the Law of Nature rests, are poles asunder. To be sure, here as elsewhere, the scholastic theology showed its skill in reconciling mutually exclusive opposites by resort to compromise. That love of God and one's neighbour which God's law requires is regarded as a highest and supernatural end and so set above the ends of the Law of Nature, while the natural law is "elevated" by the divine. But this teleological combination of natural law with God's law of love to Him and to one's neighbour, can only be brought about as the love of God is reinterpreted in the sense of mysticism. Love to God is then an act of union with the Divine Being, albeit with the help of grace, not a new relation to God as a person in which all action is rooted. In this way the fulfilment of the duties laid upon us by the law of nature loses its character of personal obedience to God and becomes a preparation for the mystical act. But the Bible knows no mystical love of God which leaves the world behind it, but only a love of God which issues in confidence in Him, in obedience to His will, and in the service of one's neighbour amid earthly circumstances. That law of God to which the Bible bears witness is a word, a living communication, a commandment to a person, and as such excludes the scholastic system of ends and can in no way be combined with the cosmic law of nature.

Catholic dogma allows the Stoic principle of the Law of Nature to be built into it because the immediate

personal relation of God and man lies quite beyond its ken. For it God is the Lawgiver who, after the analogy of the earthly lawgiver, lays down statutes which demand of men certain definite achievements. He is the Helper whose grace supports men in these achievements, and He is the Judge who judges or forgives according to the particular successes or failures a man has to show. But this view remains ignorant of the personal encounter of God and man, in which God claims the whole man for Himself, offers Himself in fellowship in His word, and through total forgiveness of sins brings man into a new relation to Himself. The juristic view which Catholicism takes of the relation between God and man finds room for the impersonal natural law of the cosmos as a lower stage of the achievement which God requires of men, just as it finds room for the divine legislation of the Church. But neither is to be united with Biblical teaching, which sets God and man over against each other, each as a whole personality. Certainly the Catholic dogma too knows of a direct relation between God and man; but this is understood in a mystical and not in a personal sense. This mystical and pantheistic feature lies at the original root of that view of the Law of Nature as the world-reason immanent in creation and which the creatures share their varying degrees. The doctrine of the Law of Nature reveals itself, therefore, as a specifically Catholic doctrine and as standing in complete contradiction to the Biblical and Reformation doctrine of the Law, and to the way in which the relation between God and man is understood throughout the Bible.

From this it follows immediately that God's Will can never be discovered from a regularity immanent in nature, whether as an objective natural order or as the structure of human nature. The laws which govern what nature is are not God's laws of what ought to be; they can be

used for evil as for good. Man has no structure which is complete in itself, but what constitutes his nature is an inescapable personal relation to God, whereby he is intended for the fellowship which God makes possible for him through His word. Therefore he finds his destiny not in himself, but in the divine word of law and promise by which God calls him to Himself. To be sure, God has so ordered his existence as a creature that in it he is to achieve his destiny of fellowship with Him, but this ordering of his life is known from the revelation of his destiny in God's law and promise, not the other way round, his destiny from the ordering of his life. Thus in the sphere of sex relations there is the man-woman or the parent-child relation. But God's Will in these relations cannot be known from them; it is identical with the challenge of *Agape*, which though it receives a concrete content only through sex-and-family-relations, does not consist in any objective organisation of marriage and the family. Only God's law as a call to Himself and to one's neighbour tells a person what he has to do in his relations with his fellows as husband, wife, child, etc. It is not that definite objective requirements are addressed to man, by virtue of his being an *animal sociale*, in definite institutions belonging to the order of creation; but rather that man is a social being because God has created him to stand in a relation of mutual love to Him and shew Him love through the neighbour. On man, so understood, in all objective demands the one obligation is laid: to love God and his neighbour. Objective demands of this kind are not themselves God's commandments, except by virtue of the love to one's neighbour which is called for in them. To take objective commandments as of God and as absolute apart from a personal relation to God is to fall away from God's law into mere legalism. Every doctrine of the Law of Nature presupposes this fall into legalism.

Such legalism also lies at the bottom of the demand for or the exposition of a "Christian sociology," for this is usually bound up with the concept of a Law of Nature. This demand starts from the assumption that there is an objective ideal state of society in which end and means stand in a normal relation to each other. Now of late we have become more cautious about drawing up such sociological programmes, partly because we have realised that every social condition is affected by its historical setting, and partly because we have observed how sin cuts across our every effort after the ideal. Yet it still seems to us that in view of the divine requirement and the power of grace to overcome sin, we are bound, in spite of all the limitations imposed by sin and by the historical setting, to strive after an ideal state of things, even though it is possible that this will never be fully reached. The definite error of this effort, however, does not lie merely in the fact that the historical relativity of every social situation is overlooked, nor even in the fact that sin too is overlooked, but in the misinterpretation of the divine law as an objective sociological programme. But God's Will is not concerned with any objective ideal social condition, any organisation of ends and means, but at our fellowship with one another in personal *Agape* under Christ as the Head which governs His Body. There is no sociological condition, no organisation of means and end which can guarantee this personal fellowship in *Agape*; it presupposes a renewal of the personality, and this no sociological organisation can promote, much less achieve. It is the Kingdom of Christ; and strictly speaking God's Kingdom is purely eschatological. To this and this alone is God's law directed. Because, however, we cannot endure this absolute law of God, because it compels us to admit our complete impotence, we turn God's commandment into an objective sociological law, which is capable of being fulfilled, at

least in part. But this is mere human legalism. A "Christian sociology" puts human regulations and the human dream of an objective ideal state of things in the place of God's law, which shows all sociological conditions and all means and ends to be but relative. Such a Christian sociology may be well meant, but it is an evasion of God's commandment. So that the Law of Nature is no more than the name for a human statute which is put in the place of God's commandment.

Up to now we have had in mind only the objective Law of Nature, understood as world-order or as the structure of human nature. But the Law of Nature has at the same time the subjective meaning that man, by his natural reason, knows this law, and that without any supernatural revelation. For Thomas the Law of Nature is the participation of the rational creature in the eternal law of divine reason. That means that human reason is clearly distinguished from the divine reason, and shares in it only in the case of theoretical and practical principles. Now the subjective idea of the Law of Nature has gained historical importance through the fact that the Reformers took it over, even while they rejected the objective conception, and so it has penetrated into the Protestant Churches. They did not understand by the law of nature a cosmic law, but in their exposition of the Decalogue treated it as the commandment to love God and one's neighbour. Even when they appealed to the order of nature as that of creation, it was still only God's law which fixed the norms of human action. The content of what they meant by the law of nature was identical with the revealed law of God, as we explained it above. So that as a matter of fact they derived it from revelation and not from reason. They called it the law of nature, however, because the knowledge of it was implanted in human nature, and though this knowledge had been darkened by sin, there

were still traces of it remaining, not adequate, to be sure, as a standard for living, but sufficient to leave man without excuse. This view obviously arose under the influence of Augustine and seemed to have the support of Rom. ii. 14 ff. The question therefore arises whether, if we give up the objective idea of the Law of Nature, we cannot at least retain the subjective one, on the condition that its content is taken to be the love of God and one's neighbour. The Thomist view of the participation of the human reason in the divine corresponds to an idealistic and mystical view of God of which the Bible knows nothing. It knows only that God's thoughts are not our thoughts (Isaiah lv. 8, 9), that no one has known the mind of the Lord (Rom. ii. 33, 34), that the plan of God was hidden from the beginning of the world (Eph. iii; 1 Cor. ii. 7–11). The Thomist way of understanding the subjective Law of Nature stands in clear opposition to this. But it is another question whether man knows of God's law. On this it must first be said that sin presupposes a knowledge of the divine will. In so far, therefore, as man was not created a sinner, but became such through his own fault, he has a knowledge of God and the divine will on which to draw. But his guilt consists not only in transgressing the divine commandment, but in perverting the knowledge of God in the darkening of the heart which has made him a fool (Rom. i. 21, 22). That he no longer knows God and His Will, as he was able by nature to know them, that is his guilt. (Gal. iv. 8; 1 Thess. iv. 5.) He no longer has God's law, but still knows by nature some particular works of the law (Rom. ii. 14, 15; i. 32), although their proper meaning and content as God's commandment is hidden from him. But this very fact betrays how vitiated is his knowledge of God's law and he becomes, therefore, without excuse before the judgment of God. One cannot know God's law if one does not know God, for it is the claim of

God's sovereignty. Man does not know God, because by sin he has turned his back upon God. The total sinfulness of man, incontestably taught in the Bible (Rom. iii. 12, vii. 14, viii. 7, etc.), excludes any possibility of his knowledge of God remaining unperverted. But this vitiated knowledge of the law can no longer, as the subjective law of nature, serve as the norm for action; for that we must look to the revealed word of God, in which He renews His sovereign claim. God certainly allows this vitiated knowledge of His law to be of service to man so far as his preservation is concerned, but it can neither complete God's revealed word nor take its place; for in it man relates the ethical requirements no longer to God, but to his idols. Thus the subjective idea of the Law of Nature has been shown to be inadequate, equally with the objective. Natural moral knowledge does not yield what according to this idea it should yield, the commandment to love God and one's neighbour, nor does it give the knowledge of God as object of our love.

Alongside the objective idea of the Law of Nature in Thomism and the subjective one in the earlier Protestantism, the idea of the Law of Nature which was a product of the Enlightenment plays a great part to-day, particularly in Western countries. This idea of the Law of Nature, or reason, is the expression of the modern secularising movement; in it Stoic Rationalism freed itself from the ecclesiastical bondage in which it stood in the scholastic philosophy. Reason itself is the ultimate standard, and not a divine law implanted in reason; the law of nature is no longer crowned and completed by a supernatural law, but the general ideas of reason possess direct regulative authority for action and for the making of laws. It is believed that the "rational" organisation of human society can be discovered purely out of general ideas of reason. The general is made into a concrete criterion. This is expressed most

clearly in the idea of justice which understands justice as the principle of equality. In order to comprise several phenomena under one idea, reason must strip off the individual and concrete, and pick out what is common, what applies in the same way to all the phenomena in question. So the idea "man" is apprehended in such a way that its characteristics apply to all men. Now the rationalist doctrine of the Law of Nature overlooks the fact that this equality of men is still only a relative one and only applicable in definite connections. It makes, therefore, a double logical leap; in the first place, starting with the conceptually relative equality of the species man it asserts men's absolute equality to one another and arbitrarily excludes their concrete differences; and further, out of this equality, which belongs, after all, to the realm of ideas, it makes a juristic equality of rights, the so-called equal rights of men to property, freedom, power, etc. As reason generalises in virtue of its synthetic function, so by its analytic function it isolates its objects conceptionally. Rationalism makes an actual isolation out of this conceptual one, considering man purely as an isolated individual and so denying the social relations which are inseparable from human existence. Thus the rationalist doctrine of the Law of Nature in two respects does violence to reality by its concepts, confusing ideas and reality in a way which logic bars at the outset. For human beings are in reality neither equal nor isolated individuals; it is precisely on their inequality that their relation to one another rests: Husband-Wife, Parents-Children, Leader-Led, Teacher-Scholar, etc. As the theoretical apprehension of reality by reason is only a relative one, so in matters of practice it can do no more than set up hypothetical norms; it can say what must be done *if* this or that end is to be reached, but it cannot of itself fix any ultimate end. So, then, the ends which the rationalist

doctrine of the Law of Nature sets up are arbitrary and lacking in any adequate foundation; they do not arise out of reason, but human nature provides the capital which is drawn on for them, e.g. the happiness of the individual or of the collectivity, regarded, indeed, since reason can do nothing concerning the good of the soul, as a physical happiness and well-being. This means that in the last resort the rationalist doctrine of the Law of Nature turns out to be eudaemonistic and materialistic. Its apparent concern with the claims of morality, which commends it to many Christians when they realise that the absolute law of love is beyond their power to fulfil, comes from the fact that it strives after the greatest possible well-being and the freedom of all, because only thereby does the good of the individual appear secured. But this apparent altruism leaves unchanged the individualist, egoist and materialist tendency of this ethic. And in this respect there is only a difference of emphasis between the individualist Liberalism of the Western democracies and collectivist Communism; the goal is the same, it is only the paths to it that differ. This moral enthusiasm in pursuit of the material good of the greatest possible number cannot, however, conceal the sharp opposition there is between such a eudaemonist and materialist ethic and God's law. The rationalist Law of Nature is not the commandment to love one's neighbour, which has its starting-point, content, and goal solely in the love which God has shown to us in Christ. It arises from a human selfishness which hides itself behind the humanitarian and altruistic mask. The oecumenical discussions which the Churches are carrying on would perform signal service if the falsification of the Christian ethic implicit in the rationalist Law of Nature were detected and rejected, for it is far more dangerous than any frankly unchristian ethic. It can only lead Christians astray from the true commandment

of God in Christ. According to the divine commandment of love, care for the material well-being of the needy and philanthropy, which should on no account be rejected as such, can only be *signs* of a love which loves our neighbour as a child of God. Once it becomes a final goal, it has ceased to be the love of Jesus Christ. But in the rationalist Law of Nature, the physical well-being of the community as a whole and the utmost possible emancipation of the individual become ultimate ends. Thus obedience to God's law and recognition of the rationalist Law of Nature are mutually exclusive.

3. THE THEOLOGICAL SANCTION OF THE LEGAL ORDER

The purpose which the Law of Nature is meant to fulfil is, in the first place, to tell a man, be he Christian or non-Christian, what he is to do in the relations into which he enters in the world, and in the second place, to provide at once an ethical basis for the legal order and a criterion for positive legislation and for social organisation generally. The previous section showed us that the ethical question is not answered by the Law of Nature, but by God's spoken law. Now, as a person justified through Christ, the Christian does not stand under the law, for this can only condemn him, because he has not fulfilled the law and in this earthly life never can fulfil it as God's will requires. The Christian stands no longer under the judgment of the law, but under God's gracious acquittal, under the forgiveness which faith receives; he stands under grace, for he stands under Christ as the living Lord who rules his life. Here God's law loses its character of judgment; it does not thereby lose significance for the believer since it shows him what it means in practical life to stand under the living Lord: it becomes a promise not only of what the believer is commanded in Christ to do, but also of

what is given to him. Its content is and remains the love of God and one's neighbour. The question of what should be done in concrete cases is not answered by a complementary Law of Nature, nor by a timeless theory of social institutions, but by a love which arises out of the concrete connections with and relations to his neighbour in which a man always stands. Every objective fixation of this activity of love would once again put a human statute in the place of the divine commandment of love, and would be a fall into legalism.

If this, so far as the essentials are concerned, is the answer to the ethical question in the strict sense, which has to do with the responsible action of the individual, we have still to deal with the question: what is the norm for the sociological structures, the institutions which bind men together, and especially for the legal order of society? Here the special problem meets us which the doctrine of the Law of Nature hoped to solve, and for which we must again find a solution if the Law of Nature seems to us inadequate. The answer to the question how the Christian is to act *in* organised human society—this can only be determined by the commandment of love—does not solve this problem of the norms by reference to which the establishment or renewal of the social institutions is to be effected, and of the criterion to which the supra-individual action of these social entities is subjected, since they do not stand in anything like the personal relation of individuals, and therefore God' scommandment of love is quite inapplicable to them.

These two sets of questions must be separated clearly from each other. Lutheranism tends to see only the first question, that of personal ethics, and to accept the forms of social organisation as given, or actually to apply to them purely secular standards. On the other hand, the thought of the Western nations which has been shaped by

the influence of Catholic teaching of the Law of Nature and by Calvinism, tends to take the opposite view, that only action in the sphere of social ethics, aiming at the development or improvement of organised society, is specifically Christian, forgetting in so doing that the love of one's neighbour which God's law requires can only be attained in a personal relation of man to man as total self-abandonment, and, even then, only through the grace of Christ. It is thus a reality, not in any definite social organisation, but only in the fellowship of believers, the Body of Christ. But it will not do to play off these two ethical questions against each other; we must look at each in its place and the two in their interrelation. Here we have to do with the second question only: What norm is there for the development and action of social organisations in this world? The decisive point for this problem lies in the legal order, for this overlaps all other forms of social organisation, marriage, the family, the economic system, the nation, associations for cultural purposes, etc., and it is this which gives to them their obligatory character. By the legal order we understand, therefore, that organisation of social life which is obligatory upon each individual and which possesses the force to enable it to assert its obligatory character against any one who commits a breach of it. So that our question takes on thus the narrower form: Whence does the legal order receive this obligatory character and authority which are binding upon conscience? Further: What is the criterion for legislation within this legal order? And finally: To what commandment are the forces which protect the legal order subject? Here there can only be *one* norm, which gives its obligatory character—binding on the conscience—to the legal system, and gives the final criterion both to legislation and to action for the forces which protect the law.

Of course, the positivist view of law is convinced that

it can dispense with any such basis for law. It is enough for it that a law is put into force by a political power. The will of the sovereign power is for it the sufficient basis of law, and the free decision as to what legislation is to be passed is left to it. The political authority is at liberty to make what law seems to it necessary for the maintenance of order and the stabilising of its power; in each case it may conform to the historical circumstances which confront it. Certainly this view of law does more justice to the concrete realities of the legal order than one which works with the Law of Nature. For, as in international law, so within the State, the actual decisions do not rest with general principles but with the real distribution of power. Might and right are not mutually destructive opposites; might certainly does not take precedence of right, but right without a protecting might is impotent. The validity of law depends in fact on the will of a protecting might. Yes, might *is* right too, but at the same time, it has an enhanced responsibility as well. So there is no room for objection if legislation takes as its goal the stabilisation of the existing might and the creation of order in the concrete historical situation. But the fact that the law is made by a force which possesses physical and political power cannot of itself give any law an authority binding upon conscience unless men feel it to be "just." This sense of what is just will always apply to positive law the test of "justice," for this alone can give it authority for conscience, and that even when the physical protection of the law is not always present. For physical force is only a *protection* for the law against the law-breaker and does not invest the law with any *authority*. So that the positivist basis for law, if carried to its logical conclusion, is untenable.

We are still in the sphere of positivist thinking when the basis of law is sought in the utility which the legal order

has for the biological and historical maintenance of a concrete society, say the nation. Law is thus not an end in itself, but a means to the end, which is national self-preservation. The national ethos and the sense of the nation's rights, as those are embodied in the ruling stratum of the nation, serve as the standard of what promotes the self-preservation of the nation, and this is what gives it binding authority for conscience. ("Law is what is in the interests of the nation.") Now law is, in point of fact, the organisation of a concrete society; legislation which does not maintain a society but destroys it, is not law. All the same, the ultimate ground and norm of law cannot be national self-preservation: collective utilitarianism is just as intolerable in law as in ethics, for it hands us over to a complete relativism. On this view injustice and deceit could become law if the nation derived a momentary advantage from them. And besides, our view of what means are necessary to the preservation of the nation will diverge according to our political opinions. But if what for the time being is regarded as the nation's rights is set up as norm—it being assumed that there is such a thing as this sense of its rights on the part of the nation and that it is uniform throughout the nation—law is given up to unlimited subjectivism. Conscience, in its discernment of right, however, is bound only by a norm which stands over against it and is valid independently of person, nation, or time. A concrete society is preserved just by the fact that it does not regard itself and its preservation as the norm of law, but obeys a righteousness which stands above it. So that we cannot make any use of this idea that the basis and norm of law are to be found in the condition of a concrete society.

A step beyond this view was taken when the basis of law was found in a theological doctrine of orders, as it has been worked out pre-eminently in confessional Luther-

anism since the nineteenth century. According to this, while particular forms of social organisation have in themselves no authority as law, they acquire such authority from God, who has created them in the course of history and employs them for His creating and preserving activity. They are the orders of marriage, the family, the nation, the State, the economic system, etc. For our problem it is immaterial whether these orders are spoken of as orders of creation or, with reference to the fact that the creation has fallen, as orders of preservation, or are in part brought under the one category and in part under the other. In their existence as historical actualities they are regarded as the expression of the divine will. Certainly God's law stands above them, but it is they who supply the norms for concrete historical action, particularly in the political sphere. The law, therefore, can only be established upon the foundation provided by these historical orders given by God. For the development of these orders themselves, their divine meaning, God's Will in creating them, is decisive, but apart from that their development is subject to human reason. Only the Will of God in these orders is distinguished from the will which holds sway in the Kingdom of God. This theological doctrine thinks it is in agreement with Scripture and the intentions of the Reformers, because it distinguishes the kingdom of this world from God's Kingdom and yet also concedes to the kingdom of the world a divine authority. But in reply to this it must be said that neither in Old Testament nor New, does the Bible appeal to orders, but wholly and solely to God's law and His commandments. Even such things as the relation between the sexes, the family, and property are not orders which God has set up; they stand under His commandment. Only God's commandment enables us to decide whether a human condition is "in order" or not, and if we also take into

account the interpretation given to this commandment in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. v. 21–48), it is evident that Scripture knows no state of human society which is in order and which could therefore be regarded as in any respect in accordance with the divine will. Scripture knows no human institution which, as a concrete actuality, is what God would have it and therefore binding on conscience. Certainly all that is, is from God, and nothing has come to pass without His Will in creation and preservation; but just because God's action is thus universal it will not do to pick out from what God has created certain definite human institutions, as if God's Will in creation and preservation were fulfilled in them. Scripture does not conceive even of the State as a divine institution, and this is certainly not because otherwise there would not have been any State. Of the highly-developed Roman State-system the New Testament takes no notice; like everything else, it is of this world and belongs to human things. The word *politeia* meets us in the New Testament only in the sense of citizenship or with reference to the political organisation of Israel (Acts xxii. 28; Eph. ii. 12), and *politeuma* only in the eschatological sense. The organised state is not denied, but neither is it set up as divine. Scripture does not reckon with divine orders, but with political powers which have their authority from God, with kingdoms to which God has for a time given rule on earth, with rulers to whom power has been given from above. So the Old Testament knew that world-powers like Assyria and Egypt possessed authority from God actually to carry out His punishment on His people, though that does not prevent their being judged by God for their pride. There are, therefore, no timeless divine orders, but particular historical powers which are not as such more acceptable to God than anything else man can show as his work, but which have a mandate from God

to bear rule, though this can be withdrawn from them again. In this way the world-kingdoms appear in Daniel's vision (Ch. vii.) in the form of beasts of prey to which rule is given for a definite time, till the kingdom of the Son of Man comes. And it is characteristic of the New Testament, too, that government is viewed either in general as a person or as a power which is personified in historical individuals. Jesus sees only the persons who administer the government, Caesar (Mark xii. 13–17), Pilate (John xix. 2), Herod (Luke xiii. 32). Their kingdom is of this world and stands in complete contrast to His Kingdom of truth (John xviii. 36, 37). So Paul looks on the government as powers possessing divine authority and embodied in the *archontes* (Rom. xiii. 1 and 3; cf. 1 Pet. ii. 14). It is God's minister as a responsible person and not as an impersonal institution. As God's minister the sovereign power exercises on earth the divine functions of ruling and judging (Rom. xiii. 2, 4–7). To the person of God as Ruler and Judge there corresponds the personal character of earthly sovereignty. In this divine office, which it has because God has given it this power, this *exousia*, it must reward the good and punish the bad—it may be with the sword. In the exercise of this office, it is entitled to respect and honour, yes, to tribute as well (Rom. xiii. 17; Mark xiii. 17). As authorities appointed by God, the government is entitled to submission and obedience on the part of Christians (Rom. xiii. 1, 2; Tit. iii. 1; Pet. ii. 13, 17) and that, too, because prompted thereto by the love which gives to every man what it owes him (Rom. xiii. 8). This obedience goes without saying in the case of the Christian also, since the ruling power can only reasonably require the doing of what is good. So that, strictly speaking, nothing is demanded of the Christian as obedience to the authorities beyond that to which he is already pledged. Certainly the Christian is free through

Christ from every law, including that of an earthly sovereignty, but he remains God's servant all the same and, therefore, when in the exercise of his freedom he does what is good, he cannot of himself come into conflict with the ruling powers or persons. But if he suffers unjustly at their hand, this is acceptable with God (1 Pet. ii. 20). For the rest, the ruling power, in so far as it is a person with responsibility to God, comes under God's judgment too, if instead of being His servant, it puts itself in His place (Rev. xiii. 11–18; 17; xviii. 1–3). The situation of the ruling powers is parallel to the *exousia* which is given to the man over the woman (Col. iii. 18; Eph. v. 22), the parents over the children (Col. iii. 20; Eph. vi. 1–2), the master over his slaves (1 Pet. ii. 18; Eph. vi. 5–8; Col. iii. 22–25).

From all this it follows that Scripture does not set over us as divine laws any impersonal and static orders, whether ascribed to creation or to preservation, nor any rational human structures such as the State, but personal powers. The institutions which human reason has created for the purposes of social life, the life of the sexes, the family, the nation, and the state, are and remain *human* institutions with which men cannot dispense, and have only human authority. But God has given to historical and personal powers the authority to rule and judge us. It is not to "the State" and "the nations" as impersonal institutions that we are subject. The only question for the Christian is: Who has the power and, therefore, the divine authority? —whether this is a king or a dictator, a national leader or a parliamentary majority. A Christian man must subject himself in freedom to the powers that be and yield them obedience through well-doing. Their authority, however, is itself limited by God's authority. So that in the last resort, what we are subject to is not the legal order as the law which has force in our society, but the person who

through this legal order rules and governs us. Further, our obedience to the ruling power as God's minister is given in the last resort, not to this power, but to the Will of God, obedience to which the ruler must protect and promote, while punishing the transgression of it. When, therefore, the philosophy of the Law of Nature and idealistic thinking would have us work with certain abstract "orders" as normative ideas, we shall have to turn away entirely from this to the concrete thinking of the Bible, which reckons with responsible ruling persons and powers whose mandate derives from God. And this has the advantage also that we come to see social institutions as human and earthly facts, and can do justice to them in their historical limitations and their human character. Thus we are delivered from the temptation either to do violence to existing institutions in the name of an ideal derived from the Law of Nature, after the fashion of a revolutionary Utopianism, or to declare them sacrosanct in the romantic temper of Confessional Conservatism. But so much the more urgent will be our task, whether as Government or as subject, of moulding them after God's Will, just because of their earthly character. For as social institutions give a form to our intercourse with each other, they cannot be regarded as ethically neutral territory; we are as responsible for the institutions in which our intercourse is carried on as for that intercourse itself. Hence, all quietism which would leave the social order to itself, and forget our responsibility to shape it according to the Will of God must be rejected.

We therefore arrive again at the question from which we set out: What is God's Will for the institutions of human society, and in particular for the legal order? We have seen clearly that these institutions neither carry their criterion in themselves nor are to be moulded according to some divine idea of what they should be. Much more then,

the legal order as the order which impinges upon the whole of human life in society can only have obligatory character for conscience if it is able to appeal to a Law which is independent of it and derives its validity from God. Or more accurately: Earthly law holds good only because in the last resort it is not the law of earthly entities but God's own Law. Ultimately, for conscience, the binding authority of a legal system in this world does not lie in itself, but only exists in so far as it recognizes and puts under the protection of earthly force that Law which derives its validity from God. The earthly law-giver cannot make laws at his own caprice and in his own authority; he can but create forms which afford protection to that Law which derives its validity from God. And the legal order which affords the protection derives its authority from the same Law. In this point we are in complete agreement with the doctrine of a Law of Nature, and this is the living truth in it. But in opposition to it must be said: *This higher Law (Recht) is not a law (Gesetz) implanted in the world, but is God's own right (Recht) as Creator in His creatures.* It is the authority not of timeless norms which God has set up, but of the holy Person of God Himself, who is present in His creation as the Creator and asserts His right over His creatures. As the creation is not self-existent, but lives at every moment by the breath of God, so it has law and inviolability not in itself but in God alone. But just because the creation does not exist of itself and in itself, but is maintained in being by God, because it cannot be cut loose from God's own existence but belongs permanently to Him as His creation, it has a share in God's holiness and every appropriation of the creaturely not expressly permitted by God is a violation of His rights in His creatures. In the world the law is holy because God is holy and creation is His holy possession. The creatures

have neither a right over themselves nor over each other, but have, in themselves and in others, to respect God's sole right as Creator; for the holiness which God confers on the creatures remains God Himself, and the creatures, therefore, cannot dispose of it. What is meant, therefore, by God's Law is not any sacred statutes or institutions like those of the Law of Nature, but God's own holiness which becomes concrete in His creatures and the violation of which He punishes as the Eternal Judge. All earthly law has its ultimate authority, source, and norm in the holiness of God.

But it is not reason which shows us this, it is the revelation of God's person in Jesus Christ, in whom He reveals Himself, as the holy God, Creator and Lord. So that we cannot infer God's holiness as source and norm of law from the creatures themselves, but only come to know it in the face of Jesus Christ. The bases of law are not any principles which can be separated from the holiness of God, but God's own holy Person. But this appears to us only where it has become flesh in Jesus Christ. So that the ultimate authority and criterion of law are not to be derived from some consciousness of rights implanted in reason but only from the revelation of God in the flesh. The God whom sinning reason deduces from the world is not the true God but a human idol; and this is as true of the God of the Law of Nature.

God reveals His right over creation by revealing His righteousness in the person of Christ. It is the judging righteousness of God which He displays in the Cross of Jesus Christ, as well as His forgiving compassion. That righteousness is revealed in the Cross in so far as God confirms there what was written in the Old Testament law, by Christ bearing the curse of the law (Gal. iii. 13): but that means that God makes good His just right over the human creature by requiring from him, as Lord and

Creator, what He gives him. God gives man life and at the same time requires it from him in His service. He gives us our earthly and creaturely life, with all the gifts that belong thereto, as our own; but we and all that we are do not belong to ourselves nor to another, but to God. He therefore demands no more of man than He gives him, but what He gives, that He demands in utter surrender to Himself. Further, God created man for fellowship with Himself and wants to give him a share in His own divine and eternal life. But He gives this eternal life only to the "righteous," the holy, those who are "perfect" as He is perfect. Only he who is in harmony with God's own just and holy nature has the promise of eternal life, eternal death awaits the unrighteous. That is God's righteousness in action towards the human creature: God's right over men is the right of His just giving to men and requiring from them, a right which none may dispute with Him.

A man's life, therefore, like his honour and property, is inviolable, because it is God's gift to this particular man and none may lay hands on it. And so man's freedom to obey God may not be violated, because God alone can lay claim to man's freedom and obedience, unless it is that God wants the obedience due to Him to be exercised towards some other man. So every man is, as a man, entitled to respect, since God has given him the promise of eternal life and he therefore owes to God a holy life. It is only from this starting-point that the oft-discussed problem of the relation of Christian freedom to civic obligation can be answered. The standard for that freedom to which man can lay claim is not his nature as a rational being; his freedom from earthly constraints is grounded solely in God's claim on him. Only *that* limitation of his freedom which hinders him from his due obedience to God is unjust, since it is an infringement of God's right over man. But God's claim on man can be

known only from His revealed word and not from a rational law of autonomy. The right of the individual does not have its ground in the individual himself; he can make no claim to a freedom which would fall to him independently of God's claim on him. The individual is not the source of law, and just as little is he its standard, as though the legal order had only to protect the life and freedom of the individual. God's claim on us by no means implies external and legal independence on our part, as it comes to us equally through concrete constraints and independently of them. God did not create us as isolated individuals, but His creative act set us in the unity of the human race. Therefore, God's claim reaches us through human society, and this meets us in concrete shape in our neighbour. As, therefore, society has to respect God's claim on the freedom of the individual as God's right over him, so on the other hand the individual has to respect God's right in the community, which under certain circumstances can bid him give up his life in its service. God's right over the individual is at the same time the right of the community in him, but the right of the community over the individual is rooted in and limited by God's right and claim on the community. Whether as nation or as "humanity," the community as a collective entity is as far as the individual from being the ground and standard of right. Neither individual nor community has a right of its own which God has, as it were, made over to them; the relative right of the one as against the other is the absolute right of God over them both. Between Thou and I, between community and individual, stands God Himself as Creator and Lord. The individual is ultimately only an individual before God, before whom alone he has to give account of himself, and the community is ultimately only a community through the fact that its members have in common this responsible relation to

God. The community is more than the sum of its individual members, and it exists prior to them, because it is rooted in and maintained by God's sovereign claim. It is not self-sufficing, nor is its basis to be sought in extra-personal ends, but in that responsible relation to God through which God makes the individuals of service to the community and the community of service to the individuals. In any case the relation of the individuals to the community and to each other has their relation to God as a connecting link. So that law cannot be derived from an immanent balance of the rights of the individual and those of society, nor from a harmony of purposive interrelations governed by the Law of Nature, but only from the fact that in the relation of the individual to the community, and vice versa, God asserts His right over them both.

But this discovery that the basis of and norm for earthly law is the right of the Creator-God revealed in Jesus Christ leads to yet another consequence: God creates us in time as temporal beings in concrete historical circumstances. This means that His right as Creator is not a timeless one over the abstraction "man," but is related to particular men in history, and so, while it remains the right of the eternal God over His creatures, it is subject to temporal and historical restrictions. Historical contingency determines the creaturely existence of man at every point, since there are only historical men, and the general idea of man never becomes a historical reality. The gifts and the tasks which God assigns alike receive their content, their measure, and their differences through this factor of historicity. God claims all men altogether, but His concrete claims on them differ, as He created them different. God's right to the individual is, as divine right, the same in all, and yet the rights of individuals with regard to each other, like their duties

to each other, are historically diversified. Right stands in indissoluble correlation to one's historical task. It is always the same God who asserts His right, but the content of this right varies with what He gives to the individual and requires from him. For those differences which appear in history are no less God's creation than the points we naturally have in common, which, however, can only be detached by a process of abstraction from the historical reality. The eternity of law does not, as in the theory of the Law of Nature, rest on rights which are unalterable and apply to all to the same extent, but on the eternity of a God who is *Himself* present at every moment with His claim of right. With this we are delivered from the embarrassment into which the Law of Nature must fall if it is to receive a concrete application, because no concrete norm can be deduced from general ideas. Positive law has, therefore, never really risen out of the Law of Nature, but always out of historical circumstances. It was not the Law of Nature itself but the authoritative interpretation of it in the Church which established a relation between it and positive law, and the obvious contradiction between the theory of the Law of Nature and the historical reality of positive law was explained by recourse to the necessities of a sinful world. In the doctrine of the Law of Nature, the divine standard for law is abstract and without contact with history, the latter being taken into consideration only when positive legislation is dealt with. In our view, God's right as standard and norm of positive law is as historically concrete as God's creative action among men.

With law thus based in God's right over His creatures, the standard of justice is also forthcoming. Justice, generally speaking, is that relation which recognises another's right and grants it to him. That formula of justice, *Suum cuique*, remains empty so long as it is not certain what right is due to anyone and why. Our enquiry has led us to

the result that there is such a thing as law (*Recht*) only as God's right (*Recht*), and that earthly law is God's right in His creatures. Its validity does not rest on any human statute nor in any rational principles nor even in its being arbitrarily laid down by God, but in God's holy nature and His righteousness. Man's righteousness is accordingly that relation which recognises as just God's right in His creatures. This right of God's is the sole valid right, all other right having only an authority derived from it, and what is required of man as righteousness (*Gerechtigkeit*) only the recognition of this right of God. In other words, there is justice (*Gerechtigkeit*), even in the juridical sense, only as subjection under the majesty and sovereignty of God. On the other hand, subjection under God's majesty and holiness, since this can only be practised by the believer in Christ and through the Holy Spirit, cannot be separated from justice with regard to God's right in earthly relations. As faith alone gives God what is His right, so only that love of the neighbour which is rooted in Christ exercises justice towards another. As little as love of God and of one's neighbour are two things, so little are justice towards God and towards man. On the other hand, a love of one's neighbour which does not give the other that right which is his in God is no love of one's neighbour in the sense of God's commandment. Love begins by once for all allowing the other's right full scope. This is shown most clearly in the second table of the Decalogue: Love honours the divine authority which parents have over their children and government over its subjects, it respects the life, the sex, the property, and the honour of the neighbour as given him from God, and gives up any thought of taking for itself what is God's gift to the other. That in so doing it honours God's right is shown by the fact that it withdraws from fellowship with the other when he makes wrong use of God's

gifts to himself, and by that fact affirms that its justice towards the fellow-man is justice towards God. On the other hand, love is not confined to justice; justice and love are related to each other as God's justice to His love. God is compassionate and forgiving love, and in this love He does not act as His justice requires, for in that case He would have to destroy us. And yet His holy justice is fully affirmed in His love, by Christ dying on the Cross for us. So love of one's neighbour allows justice towards the other to have its full force and yet love goes beyond what falls to the other as a matter of justice, giving him more than he can claim. In spite of the opposition to his sin which justices requires, it maintains fellowship intact in forgiving trust; yes, it can suffer injustice, even though God's right is injured thereby, as Christ sanctified God's justice on the Cross. Justice and love are, therefore, not identical, but they do not stand ultimately in contradiction to each other, for only that love is in accordance with God's Will which has fully taken justice up into itself. On the other hand, it is only the love of one's neighbour that is rooted in faith which can demonstrate the justice which God demands, as it alone embraces the other in the totality of his person as God's child.

As a matter of fact, therefore, only he who believes in Christ can show justice towards God and man. Apart from faith, injustice prevails towards God and among men, and as even among Christians faith in Christ is only present in embryo, we must say that the justice which accords to God His right in His creatures is in fact nowhere to be found in the world. Now, in order that men's injustice towards each other may not destroy them, God has commissioned the ruling powers to use the force they possess to set up a legal order which brings punishment upon offences against justice. Justice between men should be

exercised by love and can only so be properly exercised; but as love fails and selfishness carries the day, the legal order has the task of carrying the protection of law so far as to prevent the ruin of human society. The positive legal order is not therefore, as the doctrine of the Law of Nature asserts, merely the positive exhibition of justice, but is also a substitute-order which, being what it is, cannot make justice a reality since this remains reserved to love. It is only there because of sin and it presupposes sin. This applies not only to criminal law, but to civil law and constitutional law as well. A positive legal system can do no more than affirm the right or law which exists and has its ground in God prior to such a system. This alone gives it an authority for conscience which goes beyond fear of human constraint. But the fact that this law needs to be affirmed and protected assumes the possibility of its being transgressed: as the oath presupposes untruthfulness, so a contract which is under the protection of the law presupposes the possibility of bad faith and breach of the law. And the limitations which inhere in the legal order also show that it is a second-best. For it does not embrace human life in its totality, but only its overt action. Unlike love, it no longer has to do directly with man as God's child, but only with those relations of his within the world which can be brought out into the open, his life and external freedom, his property and honour, and his active function within the concrete community. So that it abandons the territory of the ethical, and effects by so doing a distinction which love can never make, for it limits the territory in which it proposes to protect the right, and takes personal behaviour and inner motive into consideration only in so far as they are needed for judging the deed which issues from them. Besides the legal order is never of itself the establishment of justice, but at the best is only a means to this end. Whether, as regards ex-

ternal conduct at least, justice is done by means of it, depends entirely on the human action which follows its rules. Justice does not lie in the juridical validity of a legal system nor in its agreement with an abstract principle of right, but in human action, which alone, with the law as guide, can be "just." A legal system accords with justice only when it leads to action that pays at least external respect to right; and whether the legal system is just can only be decided by whether this is the result of it or not. The ambiguity of a system of positive law is shown clearly when we generalise cases dealt with by it. On the one hand, the protection of right against human caprice demands a similar decision in similar cases; on the other hand, the historical character of all human existence is such that the similarity of cases is never more than a relative one, so that the very equality in the treatment of them which justice calls for becomes unjust. The judge is bound to positive law only because of the fallibility of human judgment.

This fact that the legal order is a second-best, and the limitations and ambiguity to which in consequence it is subject, do not, however, mean that it has a different standard from that of the right which has its ground in God. Certainly, the range of what can be stated in juristic terms, ruled and judged, is necessarily restricted; all the same, a system of positive law possesses its standard, authority, and goal only in virtue of that norm of justice which is based on God's right. The legal order can be subjected to no other purpose than the achievement of justice. Of course, it is also the task of the legal order to preserve life and society from the threat of chaos and to maintain and promote their development. But it is by serving justice that it serves the maintenance of life and society, because injustice is destructive of society and of what cannot be separated from that, human life itself. If,

therefore, the law is subordinated to a heterogeneous end, if life's impulse to self-assertion becomes an end in itself, it loses its divine authority, falls a prey to relativity, and after that can find support only in naked force. A positive statute, however, derives its authority from a justice which inheres in it independently of itself. This, and not the mere purpose of the lawgiver, is the principle by which it is to be interpreted and applied. As the legal statute can never stand to the divine norm of justice in any other relation than that of service, this and this alone justifies us in a particular case from going beyond the letter of the law, so that legal commitment to the letter may not become injustice. But this subordination of positive law to the divine norm of justice is not the sacrifice of life to a principle, because here there is no timeless principle, but just the recognition of the divine right in the historical creatures with whom one is for the time concerned. In the same way the thesis that the basis of positive law is to be found in the divine norm of justice does not stand in antithesis to the other view that it derives its actual sanction from the distribution of power in a given case. For power, too, is God's gift and as such gives rise to a claim of right, though this right again has its limitation as its ground in God's right. Finally—and here is another difference between our view of law and that which works with the Law of Nature—the thesis that positive law is based on the divine norm of justice is not opposed to claims of right derived from historical fact, since God's creation does not take place in a void, but brings the historical nexus of events within its range. A right or law, therefore, which has its basis in history, is no less rooted in God's right than a claim of right put forward in the present; both have God's right as their foundation and are reduced by it to relativity. Neither the legitimist attempt to invest a historical right with absolute

authority, nor the revolutionary attempt to do the same for a right asserted with violence in the present or on the basis of a timeless rational principle of right can be united with God's right in His creatures. A historically founded right has lost its claim when it no longer corresponds to the clear divine norm of justice. If following it is to offend against God's right, then it must be transgressed and God obeyed. Further, it is only the historical powers which have their authority from God that are called upon so to alter positive law. Yet they may not do so at their own caprice, but must submit to the divine norm of justice, which does not admit of either a rational or a casuistic fixation, but, like the ethical imperative, is known in one's historical situation by faith in the God who reveals Himself in Christ and is present in His creatures. But even when the legal order is wholly determined and closely followed by this norm of justice, the justice achieved by it is still purely relative and limited to the scope of a possible legal system. It is not the justice which is accepted in God's sight; so that, apart from the fact that experience reveals how unsatisfactory it is, actual administration of law needs to be justified by an act of faith. This does not release us from the obligation to serve the justice commanded by God in the establishment and maintenance of the order of law.

According to our view law is based on the holiness and justice of God revealed through Christ, and can be properly carried out in its legislative, executive, and administrative functions only by faith in Christ. Yes, and that is true also of obedience to the law. How is that to be related to the fact that history knows of countless legal systems which were based merely on the natural man's or even on the heathen's sense of what is right, and that we cannot deny that these systems agree to a great extent with the norm of justice which is binding on our consciences? What are we to make of the agreements

between the divinely sanctioned law of Israel in the Old Testament and the legal practice of the ancient East? It is to facts such as these that the theory of a Law of Nature appeals. It is not to be denied that at the root of these heathen legislative systems there lies that knowledge which the natural man has of the works of the law. Why, there would be no sense of right were there no knowledge of God on the part of the natural man; that is why every genuine sense of right is at bottom religious. All the same, the natural man knows neither God nor His Will, in which the particular commandments of the law are rooted and which give them their specific content. God's justice is rather for the natural consciousness a mystery no longer accessible to it. From God's justice natural consciousness receives the truths it has; but as the root of these truths —God's righteousness and His Will—is no longer accessible to it, the ground and norm of law are sought in heathen idols, myths, world-views, and secular values: out of God's right in His creatures a right is constructed which is man's own. So in all non-Christian law, in spite of all the agreement which obtains as regards the main principles of law, its ground, specific content, and norm are misunderstood; this is expressed in countless legal regulations and customs which will not bear examination by the divine norm of justice producing a conflict which is always a living issue in the mission field, and is becoming such among ourselves as well to-day, now that the administration of law is becoming more and more deliberately a-christian. The natural man with his sense right cannot therefore be a source of positive law, quite apart from the fact that it is by no means uniform. Owing to the limitations of human knowledge, even among Christians there is no agreement as to what is God's Will in matters ethical and legal. But Christianity has God's revelation given to it as a source of knowledge of the divine

Will by which she can direct her life, while the natural sense of right possesses no such source of knowledge.

Taking the legal system as the hinge on which all the institutions of human society turn, we have worked out the answer to the question what is the norm of social institutions in general. We found that this norm is not given in the Law of Nature, but in God's revelation in the Old and New Covenants, and especially in the revelation of the divine law as the preaching of a righteousness to be fulfilled by love. Not in any return to the Law of Nature, but in a radical effort at thinking out what is involved in God's law in its total claim can the Church find the word it is to speak on this problem of the organisation of society. One might go on to ask whether, in view of the progressive secularisation of public life to-day, such preaching of God's revelation as the norm for social institutions has any sense, whether we ought not to seek after a neutral basis for collaboration with a dechristianised world, such as was apparently furnished by the Law of Nature. For as we look into the future, we see less prospect than ever that nations and states will again recognise God's revelation in Christ as the norm of the social order. Yet is not the Church a voice crying in the wilderness? It is not the success or failure which attends the Church's preaching, but *truth* only, that can be decisive for its content. We must demand from the world a recognition of the sovereignty of Jesus Christ in every territory, including those of politics, social life and law. We must preach God's claim and right without wearying, whether the world will hear us or not; that we must leave God. The Churches must not fall a prey to the temptation to conclude a pact with the world on this question of social institutions, not even if in this way "more" were to be achieved for mankind. We have only to obey the truth and await a life in the world to come, in which dwelleth righteousness.

THE REVELATION IN CHRIST AND THE CHRISTIAN'S VOCATION

by

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THE REVELATION IN CHRIST AND THE CHRISTIAN'S VOCATION

We may begin with what must ever be the source and basis of the Christian judgment on any question, namely God's revelation of Himself in Christ and the call which comes through it to the Christian believer. We venture to set forth the following propositions as fundamental and generally acceptable to evangelical Christians, despite differences in emphasis and detailed exposition and interpretation:

1. God is love. This is not the only thing that the Christian can say about God, but it is the only, or at least the most inclusive, thing that he can say about His purpose in relation to persons, to men and women. By the word love we characterize, in a final way, God's activity as it is directed towards, and operates in, that system of personal relationships in which He has set men with Himself and with one another. We may use other words to indicate certain partial aspects of God's inclusive relationship of love to persons such as justice or righteousness, bounty, grace, etc., and these may be important for minds as prone to erroneous and sentimental interpretations of love as ours are; but the distinctive Christian position is that no statement, however incidentally useful to our feeble efforts to do justice to the richness and complexity of the truth, is admissible which in any way qualifies the proposition that God, in His relation to persons, is always and only love.

2. The full and final revelation both of the fact that God is love and of the way of that love's working has been given to men in Jesus Christ. This is part of the central doctrine of the Incarnation. The divine relationship to persons is present in, continuous with, wholly of the

same pattern as—whatever phrase may be used—Christ's relationship with persons. The necessity for such a revelation arises from the sinfulness of man which blinds him to the nature and purpose of God and therefore to the nature and purpose of his own existence as a personal being. From the sinfulness of man arises also its tremendous force as the revelation of the divine love; or rather it arises from the redeeming, seeking, self-giving relationship to such sinfulness into which Christ enters. Hence the Cross has always been to the Christian mind the supreme unveiling of the depth, character, and method of the divine love to persons. The agony of the Cross forbids any interpretation of the divine love and forgiveness as an easy-going condonation of sin. It forbids also any interpretation of it which would make it contingent upon the sinner's power to deserve, or attract, it. The divine purpose is directed toward the saving of a human person into its highest life simply because he is "there" and not because he is "so-and-so"—to use Brunner's phraseology.

3. In the revelation of the divine love in Christ is given the divine standard of human personal relationships, that which men were originally created to achieve and are still under divine command to seek to realize, that which, in so far as they fail to seek or to realize it, condemns them as sinful, needing forgiveness. Sin as manifesting itself in the world of persons is lovelessness, and lovelessness is sin.

4. It is the calling and privilege of the Christian disciple, in so far as he is truly a reconciled and forgiven person, to have increasingly in all his dealings with persons what it is not possible for the unreconciled man to have, namely the mind of Christ. This is his vocation, and that which imparts at least something of distinctive quality to his life despite its abiding sinfulness and failure. He is

called to be sanctified through the Spirit in the fellowship of the Church. The fruits of the Spirit are the virtues of Christ; the virtues of Christ are relationships with persons. This having of the mind of Christ manifests itself in two directions. On the one hand it is manifested in the building up of the unity of the Spirit within the Christian fellowship itself, which Christian fellowship has no class or national limits or boundaries. On the other hand it is manifested in the type of relationship the Christian, or the fellowship, enters into with those outside the fellowship—the world. Since in neither case the persons involved are free from sin, the believer's personal relationships will derive such distinctive quality as they may have from the constant reference of them to the supreme revelation, in the Cross of Christ, of God's way of dealing with sinful persons. The believer's own sinful failures in love will be seen for what they are, needing every day the patience and pardon of God; the sinful failures of others will be seen in their true light, needing also the patience and pardon of God and calling for the believer's own costing endeavour that they, and he, should be redeemed into the true life of fellowship with God. Unless there is in the Christian disciple, in the sphere of human relationships, an increasing sensitivity, practically implemented, to the infinite demands of the love of God, to the shocking sin and tragedy of lovelessness, to the costly way, revealed in Calvary, which must be trod by God, and in some measure by those who know God in Christ, if the thing is ever to be set right, it is difficult to see what the specifically Christian vocation in human life really amounts to in the end. What do ye more than others? was a question not infrequently on the lips of Jesus.

In affirming these things the Christian is confident that he is stating, so far as words allow, certain basic actualities of the real world. This order of personal

relations, to which his eyes have been opened by Christ, is really "there" with a constitution and structure which are what they are and whose consequences will be what they will be. It is part of the order of creation as much as the physical world is. To be wrongly related to it, therefore, infallibly brings trouble and confusion. So interpreted the Christian conception of "love" is a far from sentimental one. It is the only word we have for that final and constitutive principle of the universe as personal and as directed towards persons which has been manifested in the personal life of Jesus and, supremely, in what is at one and the same time the most frightful and the most hopeful event in the world of personal relationships, namely Calvary. Because this is how things unalterably are, there are no short cuts in the restoration and building up of right personal relationships when they have gone wrong. There is only the long and costly way of love and suffering, the way of the Cross. The Christian because he has himself been redeemed by suffering love now knows—not by some sentimental *Schwärmerei* but by the inescapable compulsion of truth—that that is how things are and that he is under obligation to seek to tread the same way in his own dealings with men and women. Not for one moment must he take his eyes off Christ and His Cross as showing him through all the fogs which rise like a miasma from the sinfulness and finitude of man, his own included, the real world. So doing, he is ready to claim that he alone is following a "real politic" and not a dream, that, indeed, it is the unregenerate, worldly, Machiavellian mind which is in bondage to illusion, subjectivism, and even sentimentality.

Unexceptionable, however, as these statements may be as indicating in a general way the distinctive insights and obligations of those to whom it has been given to know through Christ the real nature and purpose of personal

life, difficulties arise so soon as the attempt is made to apply them in the actual situations with which history presents us. When we examine the actual created order in which human life has to be wrought out we do indeed find much to confirm and even to illumine and enlarge the fundamental Christian convictions set forth above. But we also find things which are exceedingly difficult to adjust to those convictions and which, in consequence, raise baffling problems for the practical life.

ASPECTS OF THE COMMON LIFE WHICH CONFIRM THE CHRISTIAN VIEWPOINT

In order to realize how much there is in the common life which confirms and illumines the Christian doctrine of love as the final meaning of our existence as persons, it is necessary to take a look at the meaning of love. This will also prepare the way for the line of thought we propose later to follow.

The obvious thing to say is that to love a person means to treat him always as a person and never merely as a thing. That, however, would hardly be illuminating were it not for the fact that, however elusive the concept of personality may be when the attempt is made to express its content in abstract terms, we know immediately in our own selves what it means to be a person, and we know immediately in our relations with others what it means to be treated as a person and not as a thing, or as a thing and not as a person. The injunction "to do unto others as we would have them do unto us" is, indeed, only admissible as a guide to moral action on the presumption that there is through immediate self-feeling in human relationships an awareness which can always give content to the otherwise merely abstract concepts of "love" or "righteousness." Trusting, then, to this

immediate self-feeling to justify the statement in at least a preliminary way, we may say without further argument that a human being is loved in proportion as he is grasped and affirmed as personal; *per contra* a relation of lovelessness always involves the disposition to, or the actuality of, treating a human being impersonally, that is to say, not as a person but as a thing.

Can we give this fuller meaning?

We may perhaps best do so by examining the difference between a personal and an impersonal relationship as these appear in an extreme form in one and the same experience. Consider, on the one hand, the relation of a scientist to the objects in his laboratory and, on the other hand, his relation to a friend whom in some real, if imperfect, sense he may be said to love. We note the following points: (1) In the laboratory the object is treated as a case, an example of a class, for which any other object belonging to the same class could be substituted. There is a deliberate flight from the concrete, unrepeatable individuality to the abstract inclusive generalization. In friendship precisely the opposite is the case. It is the individuality which is prized and the more friendship deepens, the more true it becomes that there is no substitute. This is one reason why death is the frightful problem that it is in human life. (2) In the laboratory the scientist is, in the exercise of his will, something of a despot; even though it be true that he can achieve nothing save as he submits himself to the facts, there is no intelligent will or purpose standing as an inaccessible check or limit to his own. He manipulates objects as he wills, and part of the motive of his activity is the desire to be able more and more to manipulate objects as he wills. In friendship the exact opposite holds. Not only is the other man's will in fact an independent and inaccessible source of activity, but the fact is rejoiced in as that which gives the relationship its

essential quality as friendship. (3) In the laboratory the scientist has confidence as to the future behaviour of the objects with which he is dealing because he believes that they are mechanically determined and act in strict proportion to the external environmental forces which play upon them. On the other hand, he has confidence as to the future behaviour of his friend, trusts him, precisely because he believes that he is not thus mechanically determined by purely environmental forces. Directly the attempt is made to guarantee the other man's behaviour by manipulating his situation, or playing on his fears, or exciting his passions, or deceiving him as to facts, personal trust as distinct from confidence in mechanically determined events has vanished, and friendship with it.

In the light of this illustration we may say that in proportion as a person is treated, not as an individual having a value and significance in and for himself, but as a case for which any other could be substituted; as a source of activity to be made subservient wholly and instantly to one's own will; as an object in whom no basis of confidence is sought, or believed possible, save as it is played upon by powerful environmental stimuli —so in that proportion the relation is impersonal, even though it be to a person; in that proportion it is loveless.

Is it then true to say that to treat persons thus impersonally is to run counter to a certain underlying permanent structure of the personal order, so that trouble and confusion must in the nature of the case result? The evidence that it is true is impressive and can be found not only in immediate observation of men's reactions to one another, but also in the more careful explorations of psychologists, sociologists, penologists and others. One need only observe, indeed, the reaction of one's own spirit to any suspicion that one is being

treated as a thing—as a case, as a mere instrument for another's purposes, as an object which affords no basis of trust save as it is controlled by threats or trickery or subterfuge—to know the truth of it. I am disposed to think, too, that the natural man has some perception of this essential structure of the personal order through what we call his moral sense, and that this perception finds expression particularly in the idea of justice and equality. Justice is a notoriously difficult concept for theoretical ethics, but in a dim and confused way it seems to mean something of the profoundest significance to the ordinary man. At the very least there comes to expression in it the resentment which the human spirit feels so soon as it is treated, not as a person, but as a mere instrument or thing.

Incidentally, these remarks indicate one reason why men are so prone to treat one another as things, namely the deep-seated self-assertion, egotism, power-impulses of human nature. Psychology has emphasized this point also. In dealing with things there is no check upon the will by another will. Egotism and the impersonal are closely tied up with one another, and it is, I believe, not fantastic to say that the dominance of our age by impersonal laboratory science has considerably accentuated our problems in the sphere of human relationships. Science may teach men to be humble before laboratory facts; it teaches them nothing, rather the reverse, about being humble before persons. In the laboratory it is possible, as Aldous Huxley suggests, "to have all the fun of a dictator without any of the risks and responsibilities."

PROBLEMS AND DIFFICULTIES

To consider now that which raises problems and difficulties for the Christian doctrine of love: two points—

First there is the fact that there is what may be called a "thing" side to persons. Persons have bodies which are subject to the same forces which govern impersonal objects, and their relationships with one another are mediated through their common implication in a physical environment. Physical force is, therefore, an unavoidable element in the world of persons as we know it. This has two consequences. First, that in certain situations it is necessary to act primarily, and even exclusively, in relation to the "thing" side of persons, so that for the time being at least the relationship takes a quite unavoidable shift towards the impersonal, as when, for example, a surgeon operates on a succession of cases, or an air-official calculates the weight of a load of passengers, or a madman in delirium is clamped into a strait-jacket. This, however, raises no insuperable difficulty, provided the shift towards the impersonal is realized by those involved to be incidental and temporary and part of the inevitable physical conditioning of human co-operation. Second, and much more important for our problem, where there is direct and unreconciled conflict of wills and the practical exigencies of the situation require a quick resolution of the conflict, the only method available, since wills are inaccessible sources of activity, is for one will, or group of wills, to achieve its ends through the physical conditioning of the other, or others, that is to say, through forces threatened or applied in one way or another to the body. The same necessity manifests itself from a different angle when we consider the part that subconscious, instinctive, irrational forces and compulsions play in the determination of human conduct; in face of such forces the appeal of love and reason in a situation of immediate crisis seems impossible at any rate for the time being. Human persons, in other words, in so far as they are controlled by such obscure

impulses and subconscious drives, seem to be in their essential psychical make-up partly of the order of things, and they have sometimes and in some degree to be treated accordingly.

The obvious example of this type of necessity in human relationships is the arrest and imprisonment of a law-breaker by the police. Here the shift towards the impersonal, and away from anything that might even distantly point towards that fullest realization of personal relationship which we call friendship or fellowship, is obviously very pronounced, and the danger of running completely counter to the fundamental minimal necessities of true personal relationship are correspondingly great, especially as the egotistic power-impulses of the human agent are almost certain in such dealings to manifest themselves. That this is so and that the forces with which one is dealing in such relationships are extremely delicately poised is perhaps shown by the fact that physical force when it reaches its ultimate expression in injurious violence directly applied to the body, as in corporal punishment, is apt to be felt as degrading to a degree which is never forgotten and seldom forgiven. In the body the personal and the physical become as nowhere else organically and indissolubly one, and when violence of a direct kind is exercised upon it, the person is conscious of being treated as his body is treated, namely as a thing; he feels degraded and assaulted in the ultimate sanctities of his being. Psychologists are familiar with the dangers even of mere physical touch when dissociated from respect for the person, and the devastating effects of corporal punishment are equally well known. That the whole thing derives its quality from the fact that it is a transaction in that dimension of being in which persons are bound to one another is shown by the fact that physical forces applied to the body

by impersonal agencies, such as the forces of nature, are not reacted to in the least in the same way.

Second, there is the fact that men are related to one another not only as individuals, but also as groups and through their responsibilities for and to groups. In so far as this is so, human relationships again take an inevitable shift towards the impersonal. For one thing, in action in relation to a group it is impossible to individualize, so that there is of necessity a merging of the individual in the class-generalization similar to that which characterizes laboratory dealing with things; the relation becomes statistical. For another thing, the necessities of group life make it impossible to wait for the full co-operation of all the members of the group before action is taken. So an apparatus of compulsion grows up having as its ultimate sanction force applied to the body. It is a mistake, however, to suppose that the cohesion of the group rests wholly, or even mainly, on this apparatus of compulsion. Indeed, in proportion as a group is held together by such forces—i.e. the greater the shift towards the impersonal—the more unstable it essentially is, precisely because it is the more athwart the real structure of the order of personal relations. A group held together by such forces is merely a boxed-up chaos. On the other hand, the more this unavoidable shift towards the impersonal in group life is being held in check and reduced, consent being sought and progressively substituted for compulsion, the case-generalities of legislation being adjusted as far as possible, and even at some cost, to individual needs and situations, physical coercion of the law-breaker being kept to a minimum and always directed towards his personal reformation and restoration, the more stable and harmonious and rich in personal values it is. Along these lines is to be discerned the essential and unchanging truth of democratic ideals, however little these may have been

achieved by so-called democratic countries, and the essential untruth of fascism. History affords abundant evidence to show how fraught with trouble for men this movement of group-relations towards the impersonal is, indicating once again that something structural in the order of persons is involved which cannot be defied with impunity. A special danger lies in the fact that in the group the egotistic and power impulses of the individual, which, as already said, always impersonalize their object, are given at one and the same time added power and the opportunity to disguise themselves under the forms of service and loyalty and self-sacrifice.

It is manifest that in these two inescapable elements in the created order in respect of the relationships of persons, namely the physical conditioning and the group conditioning of personal life, there lies the possibility of shocking and disastrous maladjustment and failure, or rather, to speak from the Christian angle, the possibility of the gravest sin. The egotism, fear, cupidity, laziness of men are such that relationships fall swiftly into the grossest impersonalism, the more so as the plea of necessity lies so conveniently near to hand. This is particularly so where the physical force is put into action by groups against groups, as in war. The impersonalism which lurks in all use of physical violence on the one hand and in all group relationships on the other then combine into a frightful maximum.

THE PROBLEM FOR THE CHRISTIAN

We are now in a position to state in general terms the problem we have to face.

The problem is, how may we rightly relate what was said above concerning the Christian's specific and distinctive vocation in the world to these necessities of the

historical situation and all the dangers of sinfulness they involve. We have seen that a certain shift towards the impersonal is unavoidable in human relationships and that therefore that fully personal dealing which we call love is in varying degree impossible to achieve. The problem then is how in any given circumstances should the Christian conscience, from the angle of its specific calling and vocation, *evaluate that shift*? We might state the problem somewhat artificially thus: suppose all human relationships arranged roughly in a scale of increasing depersonalization; is there for the Christian at any point in the scale a dividing line between the permissible and not permissible, so that he is bound to say at that point, out of loyalty to his vocation, "over that line I will not step, be the consequences what they may"? If there is such a dividing line, how is the Christian to know where it is and when he is being invited to step over it?

I presume that it will be generally agreed that there is such a dividing line somewhere. It is certainly possible to imagine depersonalized relationships which can be seen in advance of their ever happening to be so well over the line of the permissible that there can be no question that a final prohibition rests upon them for the Christian; thus a hard-pressed and conscienceless government might conceivably propose the torturing of prisoners in order to force the hand of a dangerous enemy at the gate. Indeed, I should suppose that the general ethical sense of humanity, altogether apart from anything specifically Christian, recognizes in general terms that there is a limit to the accommodations which may be made to apparent immediate necessities, even though it may be exceedingly hard to know where the limit lies because of the complexities of human life and the corruption of human judgment by fear, cowardice, and self-regard. That expediency is in principle opposed to genuine morality, that there is a sense

in which righteousness must be done, though the heavens fall, would be admitted by most thoughtful consciences. The baffling problem, as we have said, is to know by what principles the Christian may know what is permissible and what not from the point of view of his distinctive equipment and calling as a disciple of Christ and a reconciled child of God.

It seems clear that this question is one aspect of the more general question, how does, or should, the Christian reach a judgment upon any moral question. This latter question, however, is in my judgment not in the first instance to be regarded as different from the question what is the source of the moral judgment generally; for I should regard the specifically Christian insight into the values of any situation as arising from the cleansing and enhancement of that faculty of moral discernment which is distinctive of rational personality as such and is part of the original God-given endowment of mankind. F. H. Bradley has well stated the truth of the matter when he insists (*Ethical Studies*, p. 194) that the moral judgment in the last resort is a matter of "intuitive understanding," meaning by this, first, that it is not discursive, i.e. is not reached as the conclusion of a logically demonstrable argument from premises; second, that none the less it rests on a wider basis than the impression of the moment, namely the general spirit of the community by which the personality has been fashioned. Transferring this to the Christian experience, the only difference, and it is an infinitely important difference, would be in respect of this wider basis on which the intuition of the moment rests. This for the Christian is the whole sphere of the Christian life as indicated in the opening paragraphs of this paper—the fellowship of the Church, the means of grace, the indwelling of the Spirit, the life of prayer, the study of the Bible,

etc. We must suppose that in so far as the Christian lives truly and sincerely in this sphere of things, he is given an increasing sensitivity to the real values of any situation and to what is God's will for him in regard to it. He develops a moral sensitivity or tact which has at least something of the distinctively Christ-style or Christ-mind in it. Somewhere in all moral decision the Christian has to come to rest in immediate intuition of this sort. Thus to illustrate from the particular problem of this paper, if there is to appear for a Christian anywhere in our imaginary scale of depersonalized relationships an absolute dividing line between the permissible and the not permissible, it will be discerned by an intuitive judgment involving some sort of reaction of his whole personality as this has in its degree been fashioned by the spirit of Christ. The judgment will express a profound feeling or "tact" response beyond the reach of theoretic justification or propositional statement. He will have to say that he just knows that the limit of accommodation to the impersonal in human dealings has now been reached and that beyond it he must not go whatever the consequences may appear likely to be; and he will be bound to affirm, in so far as he is in earnest at all, that such an immediate and inarguable knowledge is not the outcome of his own unaided, solitary reflection, but is the veritable word of God to his soul in Christ.

But directly we take note of this quite unavoidable element of intuitive and non-rational immediacy in the Christian, as in all moral judgment, we are confronted by difficulties. On the one hand it is clear that grave questions of Christian conduct cannot be left to the impression of the moment. The dangers of that are obvious and need not be detailed. The Christian is under obligation to examine and check in the light of the widest witness of experience to which he has access the

compulsions which appear within his conscience, lest he mistake his own predilections for the will of God; and in particular, he is under obligation to share his mind as fully as possible with other members of the Christian fellowship. It is precisely by such interplay that his education into Christian tact and insight, through the Spirit, takes place. Yet, on the other hand, there is hardly less danger in entering into argumentation and discussion about what at first seems to be given with a high degree of moral certainty. If there is danger in "hunches," there is danger also in sophistications, rationalizations, concessions to majority opinion, and so on. Bradley, in the passage just referred to, gives considerable weight to the general belief that in the moral sphere "to try to have reasons for all that you do is sometimes very dangerous. Not only the woman but the man who deliberates may be lost. First thoughts are often the best, and if once you begin to argue with the devil you are in a dangerous state." This danger may be illustrated from the way in which the arguments brought forward in support of a moral judgment are usually infinitely more convincing to the person who has already made the moral judgment than to the person who has not; that is to say their power to convince is not intrinsic—support is being all the time surreptitiously borrowed from that to which support is supposedly being given. The dangers of crooked thinking and self-deception here are obviously great, and it is a sound instinct, as Bradley suggests, which makes the common man suspicious of a moral position which seems to require an elaborate scaffolding of argument to support it.

That the power of an argument to convince depends on the extent to which the position under discussion is already held may be illustrated in an extreme form by the difficult question of the extent to which the estimation

of probable consequences should enter into the determination of Christian conduct. Take, for example, the problem of the Christian's participation in war. The Christian pacifist who finds within his soul as absolute a moral revulsion from modern warfare as he would from denying his Lord is bound to treat the discussion of possible consequences to himself or to his family or to his country of his refusal to participate in it as somewhat of an irrelevance. Nor is this necessarily a refusal to think the matter through. Rather it is the result of a clear perception that in the nature of the case the conditions for thinking the thing through are, so far as future consequences are concerned, not to hand. For the estimation of consequences is merely the natural reason calculating probabilities upon data drawn from the past, mainly unregenerate, experience of the race. Such calculation is precarious enough in ordinary worldly affairs, but when, *ex hypothesi*, it has to do with the redemptive purpose of God operative in the world through those whom He has called to be His agents—when, that is to say, it has to do with a factor transcending history and man's natural understanding—it becomes quite impossible and therefore irrelevant. Doubtless the pacifist would maintain that in the end the consequences of doing the will of God will be the best for everybody concerned despite all that it may immediately entail of tragic suffering, and he may not illegitimately point to such indications that this will be so as past history and general experience may afford; but in the main it will be a judgment of faith resting on the prior moral conviction that modern war and discipleship to Christ cannot be yoked together. On the other hand, to the Christian who does not feel such an absolute moral revulsion of his soul from modern warfare, though regarding it as a very great evil, the all-determining consideration must be an endeavour to estimate amidst

all the complexities of modern life the probable consequences of using such methods or not using them in any situation that may arise. Thus the two lines of thought seem constantly to go past one another without ever meeting, and after all the argument both sides are left wondering at the apparent insensitivity of the other to what seems to each utterly obvious and convincing.

SAFEGUARDS

What then is to be done to save the Christian judgment from being on the one hand a merely impressionistic and individualistic feeling-response and on the other hand a judgment according to the natural values of men brought into apparent harmony with the mind of Christ by elaborate and subtle argumentations? Obviously nothing will save any individual Christian from the necessity of making up his own mind, or from some admixture of error and self-deception in doing so. To believe in the guidance of the Spirit is not to believe in the availability of an infallible moral ready-reckoner. But at least two suggestions may be offered which shall act as pointers or direction posts.

(1) First, the Christian is under obligation to seek to penetrate beneath any profound compulsion of conduct which he cannot escape to underlying principles which can be seen to be part of the whole structure of specifically and distinctively Christian living.

This would seem to be the only right way in which principles should determine conduct. They should not be laid down in advance and slavishly and woodenly applied, but rather should be continuously forming themselves along certain lines of organic consistency within the process of Christian living itself, even as the skeleton is deposited in the living body which it helps to keep firm

and erect. To try to see whether there is such an underlying structure in the life, and if so, what its main lines are and how it conforms with the revelation given in Christ, is at least a protection against a momentary and impressionistic emotionalism which makes any solid consistency of character impossible. The profound significance of the instant feeling-reaction of the Christian mind to a situation must indeed not be in any sense minimized—it is a very important datum, perhaps the most important datum for the final determination of conduct, and if it remains unimpaired after every consideration, it must be obeyed; but we have no right to obey it without first seeking to discern so far as we can its structural consistency with a whole style of life which has something distinctively Christian in it. It is perhaps not unimportant to point out that this process is quite different from what is usually called rationalization, though in one sense, inasmuch as it is an attempt to relate feeling to reflection, it may not inappropriately be called by that name. Rationalization in the bad sense means an attempt to escape the monitions of conscience by spreading over them a web of argument; the process we are thinking of is rather an attempt to plumb their depth.

Perhaps I may be permitted to illustrate this again from the issue of the Christian's participation in war, not because I wish to turn this paper into an argument for my own position, which is that of pacifism, but because that is an issue before all our minds and because it presents us with our problem in a particularly clear form.

As a pacifist I realize that the profound revulsion from all that modern warfare entails, so that I feel I cannot yoke participation in it with my calling as a Christian, is not in itself sufficient to justify an absolute refusal. Nor is it sufficient that the position should be justified on the ground of Scripture texts, for these are sus-

ceptible of various interpretations and in any case are merely external injunctions requiring internal validation; nor on the ground that war is a stupid way of settling disputes, for that is a purely natural judgment, and though war is certainly stupid, there may not be available, so far as the natural judgment can see, a better way; nor on the ground of an absolute valuation of life, for that men should die is *per se* of no consequence—they die every day and death is part of the order of creation. None of these considerations go deep enough or reveal the sort of internal structural principles which we have in mind and which should be in process of formation in any distinctively Christian style of life. So far as I can judge, the only satisfactory deeper ground of this kind for the pacifist position is along the lines previously indicated in this paper, namely that modern war when it is examined is seen to involve such a total depersonalization of human relationships that it cannot be yoked to the Christ style of life at all. It represents a cul-de-sac, a no-thoroughfare in the dimension of personal relations down which in the nature of the case a man cannot walk with Christ. Some depersonalization we have seen is unavoidable in human dealings; and however great the degree of depersonalized dealing which a situation may seem to demand, a Christian may have to participate in it, provided he can do so without completely wrecking and obscuring the whole distinctive structure and style and witness of his life as a follower of Christ. But if so far as he can judge this is impossible, then he is under obligation to Christ to refuse; his first utter revulsion is now seen in the light of its deeper underlying meaning to be justified. That war closely approximates to such a *ne plus ultra* of depersonalization, i.e. of evil, will hardly be questioned; whether it finally reaches that status can only be left to the individual conscience

to judge as best it can. Certainly it is difficult to conceive of a use of force which (a) is more wholesale, undiscriminating, in the mass; (b) more completely excludes the possibility of any accommodation to, or from, the will of those to whom it is applied, for it aims with the help of every available mechanical invention at the maximum effect of blind force, namely, the complete smashing out of existence of the whole organic body-spirit unity of the person; (c) more unavoidably demands as indispensable to its prosecution on the one hand the repudiation of the basic requirements without which anything in the nature of truly personal relationship cannot even begin, such as truth and candour, and on the other hand, the manipulation of the psychological processes of the other man by any available trick of terrorism and propaganda; (d) more completely reduces the human agents involved from the level of self-directing persons to the mechanical level of the physical forces they are putting into operation, depriving them of rights of conscience against those in command. And all this it does necessarily. To imagine that it is possible to wage modern war and not be involved in this sort of thing is sentimental illusion.

(2) Second, it may be suggested that a Christian must seek to keep dominant in his mind the sense of his special vocation in Christ. He must seek to keep dominant in his mind his calling and ministry as a redeemed man who knows through Christ the real order in which God has set mankind, and is appointed to be himself in the spirit of the Cross under God at all times a reconciler and an agent of the Kingdom. This involves the principle that all other offices, callings, responsibilities must for the Christian be subordinated to the one supreme vocation which has been set forth above.

The importance of bringing to any issue a mind

dominated by the sense of the Christian's special vocation is three-fold:

(a) To keep dominant the sense of one's specific vocation as a Christian helps once again to preserve the moral decision from being a merely temperamental, impressionistic, and momentary reaction to the situation. For it sets it in the most solemn manner in the context of the calling of God upon the whole life in all its outward relationships and inward springs. Thus, if we may be permitted again to use the example of the war issue, a pacifism which is not part of a transformation of all values, a sacrificing witness over the whole breadth of one's living against everything in the common life which is in its values and motives of the same order as war, cannot rebut the charge which is often brought against it of being an immoral and undedicated sentimentalism. Yet equally much of course to participate in the admitted shocking evil of war because the emotions of the moment are stirred over some international outrage or some threat of invasion may be open from the Christian point of view to the same charge. Again, to set the moral decision steadfastly in the context of this all-inclusive Christian vocation is to be protected against any temptation to a mere supineness in the face of evil, either by way of "contracting out" of a sinful situation or by way of "contracting in" in such wise that one merely merges oneself—doubtless with the support of all kinds of specious arguments—for the time being in the ordinary sinful courses of humanity and anything in the nature of specifically Christian witness is lost. The charge against pacifism that it is "passivism" may in some instances be well merited, but it can equally much lie against some Christians who are prepared to go into war, for their activity may mask a latent inactivity in relation to certain issues vital to the Christian witness. The pro-

tection in both cases against this danger is the resolute endeavour to subordinate the whole life to the Christian vocation.

(b) To keep dominant the sense of the special calling of the Christian helps to set in a right perspective certain factors in human life which are otherwise exceedingly difficult to evaluate.

Thus there is the problem that so much of human behaviour seems to be conditioned by what has been called sub-personal factors. That the presence of these factors in human life contributes to the unavoidable shift in human relationships towards depersonalization has already been recognized above. It may be asked whether the fact of these dark, inscrutable, sub-personal forces in history does not involve that there may be no limit whatever to the extent to which a depersonalized dealing with men may be necessary at least as a temporary measure of control, so that to refuse to go even to that extreme of depersonalized dealing which is modern war becomes a sentimental and unrealistic optimism, a premature attempt to leap into a kingdom of love and sweet reasonableness in a world which it must be supposed God has not made immediately ready for it.

How are these factors to be evaluated from the point of view of the Christian vocation and conduct? It seems that in the nature of the case, as the terms in which we are compelled to describe them indicate, they cannot be evaluated in any final way at all, certainly not sufficiently to shed much light on the problems of Christian conduct. We are not in a position to say what these sub-personal forces mean or how they are related to the working out of the divine purpose of love, revealed in Christ, in the world or beyond the world. They are part of what has been called the senseless side of history and they are capable of any number of different interpretations by the

natural reason. The Christian therefore is thrown back upon his awareness of having through God's revelation in Christ a special vocation of sacrificial witness amidst the dark inscrutabilities of the historical process, a vocation which under no circumstances can he allow to be completely submerged. He is not called upon to explain all the mysteries, or to justify in terms of the apparent immediate expediencies of human life that to which he feels under compulsion to bear witness in word and deed. He can only say that out of the heart of this dark mystery and confusion of existence there has come a revelation of its ultimate meaning; yet it is not a revelation which provides a complete and tidy philosophy of existence, but rather calls to an obedience and trust come what may. One thing he must be exceedingly careful about, and that is that he does not take refuge under these inscrutabilities from the exigencies of God's call, interpreting them arbitrarily in any way that suits and for which there is no real warrant either in reason or in the Christian revelation. Thus, for example, the assertion sometimes made that these dark forces of human nature, whether through human immaturity or through sin, are such that in certain circumstances there may be no way whatever of dealing with them save through the frightfulness of modern war, is to make a dogmatic assertion for which there is no conclusive evidence and to the formation of which specifically Christian insight has contributed nothing. It may well be argued that such methods merely release the elemental passion of men, or if it controls them, merely drives them underground, whence they reappear sooner or later with even more sinister power. Similarly, I cannot help feeling that much current teaching about demonic forces and the depravity of human nature is without any satisfactory basis, and is in great danger of becoming a mythology under cover of which there is

an unwitting flight from the vocation of meeting even the worst depravities of man in the way of the Cross and in the faith that love though apparently weak is the power of God against evil.

Similar considerations apply to the question of seeking to conserve distinctive national and race cultures and civilizations. That the Christian is called to live his Christian life in such wise that he helps to foster and maintain the specific culture of his own nation, need not be questioned. But when it comes to the evaluation of such culture in terms of the final values of the Kingdom of God, which the Christian is called upon here and now above all things else to serve, we pass again into the region of the inscrutabilities of history, indeed into the region of the ultimate inscrutability which is why the establishment of an eternal kingdom should necessitate a time-process at all. I cannot conceive or imagine what the works of Shakespeare or the symphonies of Beethoven mean for the consummated trans-historical divine community of persons. Is the 5th symphony played in heaven? Is there a counterpart of Greek or Cretan or Anglo-Saxon or German civilization in the kingdom? Nobody knows. Nor do we know what part God means these things to play even in this present scene of history altogether apart from any transcendent reference. Is British civilization so precious in God's sight that He requires me to blow yellow babies to bits in order to preserve it from a Japan which, incidentally, is equally convinced of the supremacy of her own cultural life and destiny? Natural instinct says yes, cooler reason says "I haven't the least idea," the Christian conscience surely finds the proposition faintly ridiculous. Nor do arguments from past history help much, for the past is just as inscrutable as the present. If Charles had not defeated the Moslems at Tours by armed force,

would that have been the end of Christianity in Europe? Who knows? We are here back in the precarious estimation of consequences again, only here it takes the form of trying to estimate what would have happened if something which did happen had not happened, an estimate which in the nature of the case, as pointed out above, leaves the prime factor in the situation out of account, namely the manifold wisdom of God. The Christian therefore is thrown back upon his sense of having, amidst the inscrutabilities of history, a *special* vocation which he must seek to fulfil, leaving the rest to God.

Similar considerations, again, apply to the view sometimes expressed that it is the first duty laid upon the Christian by the law of love to seek to preserve the general frameworks, or "orders of creation," since if they collapse the indispensable basis of service to, and fellowship with, one another disappears. In a broad sense this is true, but it affords no real guidance on the particular problem which is the subject of this paper, the problem, that is to say, of knowing where lies the limit of conformity with what the merely natural judgment declares to be expedient for this or that established system or framework of the common life. For, plainly, it is open to a Christian who finds himself confronted with a proposal to do in the alleged interest of, say, the order of the state something against which his whole being rebels as totally contrary to the mind of Christ to maintain (a) that it is given to the Christian through the revelation in Christ to know as none else know what the basic structure of personal and community life is, namely that it is of such a nature that such an utter repudiation of the mind of Christ, in attempting to preserve it, would in fact destroy it; (b) that it is possible to take upon ourselves too much responsibility for the preservation of the frameworks of life, to attempt to play providence to our own affairs, and

in general to display an irreligious solicitude for God. In the last resort, it might be said, it is God's business to preserve human life and whatever is indispensable to it; it is our business to do His will, committing everything else to Him. Nor would there be any means of showing such a position to be wrong, even though it might in fact be so. Hence it cannot be held that a general principle about preserving the orders really affords any guidance as to when and where the Christian may have to make the kind of final stand we have been discussing. At the most the principle expresses something which ought always to be considered in forming a judgment, though it cannot by itself be finally determinative of the conclusion reached.

(c) Finally to keep dominant the sense of one's special calling in Christ protects the Christian, in his refusal to participate in certain aspects of the common life, from the uneasy sense of leaving others to do necessary, or as it is sometimes put the "dirty", work, and profiting by it.

The Christian certainly should not let such a feeling go unexamined, but on the other hand there is a danger of allowing it to deflect him from the path of God's will for him. The important distinction between God's agent and God's instrument is here relevant. The Christian is bound to believe that he is called through the revelation he has received through Christ to be in a special sense God's agent in this so sinful, shadowed, and terribly complex world, that he has in the mysterious providence of God insights and powers and responsibilities of witness not open to others. But that does not mean that he, along with other Christians, are the only people God uses in His total grasp upon human life and in the full working out of His purpose in history; others also He uses, if not as His agents, then as His instruments. Nor

in the nature of the case can the Christian who is called in a special way to be God's agent fail to be benefited in some degree by those whom He can only use as His instruments, benefited too by activities from which by virtue of his special calling he feels bound to withdraw. Thus a Christian who at the beginning of last century was convinced of the fiendish wickedness of hanging terrified children for stealing apples would have been under obligation to refuse the office of magistrate, even while admitting that magistrates are necessary, even usable by God, and in a sense benefiting by the general system of law of which magistrates are a part. Similarly, a Christian pacifist might not inconsistently feel that a war waged by a League of Nations on behalf of a nation wantonly attacked is on a higher moral plane than most other wars, and yet refuse, in virtue of what he believes to be his special calling as a Christian, to take part. He is surely entitled to believe that God in the manifold wisdom of His providence might use both a non-Christian League of Nations dimly glimpsing and seeking a better order through armed force, and the Christian refusing to participate and seeking to contribute to the total sinful situation in some other way more consonant with the unique insights and powers which he is bound to believe God has seen fit to bestow on those whom He has redeemed through Christ. In so doing, he is not fairly accused of leaving others to do the dirty work, provided only that he does not stand aloof from it all, but himself seeks to enter costingly into it. What he does do is simply to recognize that in this chaotic and tragic world God has many ways of fulfilling Himself and can make even the wrath of man to praise him.

THE CAUSES OF SOCIAL EVIL

by

JOHN COLEMAN BENNETT

THE CAUSES OF SOCIAL EVIL

In the social thinking of Christians there is vagueness and over-simplification in the diagnosis of the particular social evils which we face. The usual form which this tendency takes is to reduce all evil to one root—sin. Even if some account is given of the specific, proximate causes of such evils as war and economic injustice these causes are not taken seriously, and emphasis is placed too soon on the fact of sin, which, since it can be used to explain everything, really explains nothing in particular. Recently the concept of the "demonic" has come into Christian thinking and, while it is a useful concept in calling attention to the fact that many of the problems of life are created by social forces which have within them both constructive and destructive elements, it is rapidly becoming a new catch-all which throws very little light on any particular social fact. Another form of diagnosis which has become popular is to trace all moral and social evils to some quite general spiritual causes—secularism or human autonomy. Those words point to important aspects of our situation, but it is often not clear how far they explain the sources of specific social evils.

There are two reasons for the attempt in this paper to press for more precise thinking about the sources of the social evils of our time. The first is that these vague forms of diagnosis cover up the quite different ways in which various forms of evil must be cured. Most theological discussion of these matters obscures the necessity of a multiple attack upon our social problems—an attack along religious and moral, educational and technical, political and social lines at the same time.

The other reason for this attempt is that the social

frustrations of our time have led Christian theologians to explore with new appreciation the pessimistic interpretations of human nature which have been an important strain in the Christian tradition, and in the light of those interpretations to make social judgments concerning what is possible in human history. We are thus being led from a dogmatic optimism which was founded on theories of progress and human perfectibility, for which there is insufficient empirical evidence, to a dogmatic pessimism which is founded on theological theories about man, for which there is also insufficient empirical evidence. It is my contention that one safeguard against this premature dogmatic pessimism is to remain longer than theological discussions usually remain within the area of specific social facts, and to seek to discover the roots of the particular social evils which have driven so many of us to this pessimism concerning the total human situation.

SOME NECESSARY DISTINCTIONS

It would bring clarity into the subsequent discussion if at the outset it were possible to state one definition of sin and adhere to it throughout. It would then be helpful to examine the relation between sin, as one factor in the total situation, and other factors. But I am driven to the conclusion that this procedure would be misleading. Any definition of sin would turn out to be vulnerable from one or another of the following perspectives: wide use in Christian thought and liturgy, faithfulness to the experience of moral responsibility, faithfulness to religious experience, or fruitfulness for social strategy. The situation is so complicated that it is not merely confusion of thought which makes Christians oscillate between inclusive and narrow conceptions of sin, between sin

as the equivalent of the total state of wrongness into which the individual is born on the one hand, and on the other the identification of sin with acts or mental states for which individuals are morally responsible. Moreover, it is not merely confusion of thought which makes Christians, when they think of others, admire freely their achievements of character and make allowances for all the conditioning factors which keep those others from being responsible for much of the evil connected with their lives, and yet, when they think of themselves, say with humility and repentance: "I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips." The only qualification which must be made here is that we would not admire those other persons if they took credit to themselves or made the same allowance for themselves. The usages of Christian theology and Christian liturgy and common speech are such that it is difficult to adhere to either the broader or the narrower conception of sin with consistency. This fact leads me to approach the problem of the roots of social evil without tying up the discussion to a definition of sin.[1] What is important, however, is that whatever be the use which Christians make of the idea of sin, they now allow that word or any other word to obscure real differences in experience. There are at least five types of experience which must be kept distinct. They are as follows:

1. The attitude of religious humility which makes the best men unable to give themselves credit for moral or spiritual achievements, which makes them regard themselves as part of the world's wrongness, which creates a sense of unworthiness which is not

[1] On page 192 I shall suggest a concept of sin which covers the least that Christians usually mean by sin.

necessarily related to any particular evil for which they are morally responsible.

2. The choices of men who are limited by an external situation which is beyond their control and which forces them to make tragic compromises with evil. Here we see the cumulative results of the evil choices of the past which have created a present situation in which men of the best intentions face limited possibilities. Into the making of this inherited external situation there has gone all the factors which will be discussed in this paper.

3. The choices of men who are living in the presence of far better possibilities than those which they choose to realize but who are blinded by unavoidable ignorance which has for them external causes.

4. The choices of men who are living in the presence of far better possibilities than those which they choose to realize, but who are blinded by ignorance which is primarily the result of inertia, selfishness, moral insensitivity.

5. The choices of men who are living in the presence of far better possibilities than those which they choose, but who deliberately and with full knowledge violate the standards of conduct which they know to be binding on them.

In any living situation it is of course impossible to separate with precision those five types of experience. But it is very important to realize that in most situations all five are present and that the way in which we deal with any particular evil will depend upon our judgment as to the relative importance within it of each of these forms of experience. There are several things to be said about the relation between them.

The first form of experience—that which I have called

"religious humility"—is in a different dimension from all of the others. The relation between this experience and specific moral evil is not clear. The more sensitive we are the more it is natural for us to associate this religious humility with a sense of participation in corporate evils for which we have little actual responsibility. It is true that all of us are deeply involved in social evil from a definitely moral point of view, but this involvement is very much a matter of degree, and those who are most responsible can usually be counted on to feel least guilt. This experience carries with it real dangers of morbidity. We can easily allow our sensitive imagination to play upon our responsibility for rather remote social evils to an extent which becomes spiritually crippling, and we can exaggerate the seriousness of many forms of personal evil to an extent which is pathological. In some cases of this kind, psychiatric help is needed to clear the way for a healthy religious life. Even such great souls as Bunyan and Kierkegaard were at this point pathological, and theological insights based upon their experience need to be discounted. But when all this is said the validity and importance of this type of experience must be stressed. It is the one corrective for the self-righteousness of the good man. It keeps our highest standards and achievements under judgment and is thus a growing point in the soul and society. It is a precondition of all profound religion.

The fifth form of experience—deliberate choice of evil—is the only place where moral responsibility is clear. There is much to be said for the argument of F. R. Tennant in his *The Concept of Sin* for limiting the idea of sin to such deliberate choice of evil, where there is knowledge of the standard, realization that a particular choice falls below the standard, and the possibility of choosing a higher alternative. But there is the difficulty

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which has already been suggested that to use the word "sin" in this way is to underestimate the importance of elements in religious experience which are written into the liturgies of the Church. And there is, what may be the more serious difficulty, the fact that a case can be made for the position that there never is such deliberate choice of evil, that all choice of evil rests upon self-deception, often momentary self-deception, at the time of choice. I doubt if that case can be made out as having universal application but the facts behind it are characteristic of wide areas of experience.

The second and third forms of experience—uncontrollable external circumstances and unavoidable ignorance—involve no moral responsibility. One illustration which has great pertinence at the present time is the situation in which whole populations are drugged by propaganda and blinded by censorship. Moral responsibility does enter into the weaving of the lies, and the withholding of the truth, but the rank and file of the people may in such circumstances be partners in vast social evil without moral responsibility which is at all proportionate to the degree of the evil. Let it be said that it would be a rare situation, in which those who face only evil alternatives do not still have responsibility for choosing between a higher and a lower alternative or are not able to do something which would be directed towards raising the level of possibilities for their successors. A small group which has the advantage of the Christian perspective on the situation, may at the worst bear a costly witness to the fact that all alternatives for positive action are evil, and thus keep alive the light of the Christian conscience and build for a future which they may never see.

The fourth and fifth forms of experience—ignorance which is the result of personal moral failure and deliberate

choice of evil—are close together. They shade into each other. Who knows where unconscious self-deception ends and conscious dishonesty begins in the soul of another? Who can be sure even in the case of his own soul? It is the fact that these two forms of experiences are so hard to distinguish from each other, except in the case of extreme examples of either, which makes it so difficult in practice, if we were seeking here to define sin, to limit it to the deliberate choice of evil. One thing is clear about both of these forms of experience: they both have a common cure. In both cases the only cure is a moral and spiritual awakening, a change in the direction of personal life, in motives and intentions. Both require purging from self-interest and the development of sensitivity to the needs of others.

To sum up the argument so far. It is clear that except for the last two of these forms of experience each of them must be dealt with in a different way. The first is a religious problem. When religious humility merges into an acute sense of guilt, either that sense of guilt, if exaggerated, must be removed by a sounder understanding of its cause or, if valid, it must lead the soul to seek healing through God's forgiveness.

The second can be dealt with only by a large-scale change in social conditions, often by political action, at least by collective action. It will require the application of technical knowledge to the solution of the problems which are involved.

The third can only be cured by enlightenment. Doubtless our educators have been romantic in their interpretation of the perfectibility of human nature and rationalistic in their view of how man is to be changed. But they represent a part of the truth, and a part which must not be too hastily abandoned in the retreat from the real fallacies which we associated with "Liberalism"

and the "Enlightenment." Knowledge of facts, imaginations which have been stretched by a wise pedagogy are essential to any approach to the solution of our social problems.

But, in the case of the fourth and the fifth, change of external circumstances and enlightenment are not enough. What is needed in the case of both is a reorientation of the inner lives of persons.

ANALYSIS OF THE CAUSES OF SOCIAL EVIL

An attempt must now be made to analyse the causes of the social evils which we find in the world to-day. In doing this it will be enough to present a list of various factors with comments upon each factor. The only value in this procedure is the effect of the whole presentation and not the discussion of this or that factor which is mentioned. If there is truth in this discussion as a whole it does clearly suggest the multiple sources of evil and the need of a multiple strategy in dealing with it. It suggests the fallacy of all religious and moral oversimplifications in the diagnosis, and short cuts in the cure, of the human situation.

The preceding analysis of types of experience in relation to evil should be kept in mind. Every factor which will be mentioned as a cause of evil in the world to-day grows out of a situation into the making of which countless human choices have gone, and all of them have been the result of varying combinations of the types of experience which have been described. Thus the moral insensitivity of the deliberate choice of evil of one person or group or generation may forge the shackles which limit in an external manner the choices of another person, or group, or generation.

OBJECTIVE FACTORS

The size and complexity of modern social problems

It is not necessary to labour the fact that our problems are both vast and complex. The degree to which all solutions involve a combination of moral elements and technical elements points to what I mean. The fact that technicians of equal expertness differ as to policies in most areas complicates the work of the moralist or of the Church in the special sphere enormously. One illustration of this fact of complexity is suggested by the so-called business cycle which produces large-scale economic misery and which is still in great measure a mystery to the experts. Varying judgments by economists as to what causes the business cycle and as to how it can be controlled complicate any effort to arrive at next steps in our economic life. Moreover, differing judgments by experts about the possibility of solving this problem of recurring depressions within the framework of the present economic system hold up any united attack upon the problem even by men who are equally concerned for social justice. One often hears it said that the depression had a spiritual cause, that it was the result of the greed of individuals. Now it is doubtless true that in America the seriousness of the depression was aggravated by the greed of those who took part in the speculative boom of the nineteen-twenties, but it is not true that in part the depression was but one more manifestation of the business cycle and that in some degree it would have come in any case.

The lags in social development

It is not merely that there is a lag in our scientific knowledge and in the level of public understanding in relation to the developments of civilization, but also that there is an unevenness in external development

which throws things out of balance—in part the result of the complexity of our problems but more a result of the dynamic character of our society. Things move too fast for the mind to keep up with them and for them to keep up with each other. The rapid development of technology within the past few decades has created innumerable problems with which we have not been prepared to deal. The persistence of old patterns of life which do not fit in the modern situation but which have great momentum make any solution of our problems difficult. Reinhold Niebuhr makes a distinction here between what he calls "senility and sin." He says: "Since death in history and in nature comes by senility as well as sin, all purely moralistic interpretations of history are mistaken." The momentum of senile systems creates much of our difficulty.

The unpredictability of results.

One of the consequences of the size and complexity of our problems is that the results of any measures which we take to deal with them are in a large degree unpredictable. The best programmes will have evil by-products and whether or not the evil by-products may come to be greater than the present evils which are to be cured we cannot be sure. This unpredictability of results is an external factor which encourages all forms of conservatism, including sincere and socially responsible conservatism in the face of the evils which now exist. It therefore contributes to the inertia of institutions which throws things out of balance in a dynamic world.

The necessity of concerted action in dealing with problems

Many of the problems cannot be solved piecemeal or by action on the part of those who see farthest, one at a time. To be dealt with at all they must be dealt with

by all parties concerned at once and many different problems must be dealt with at the same time. In this way our problems become almost unmanageable. In order to ease the international situation it is necessary to get concerted action at the same time by the nations involved—concerted action also at once in relation to international economic injustice, reduction of armaments, provisions for collective security.

The positive bias towards evil embodied in institutions, movements, and social habits

This factor is the result of all the others and especially the result of the subjective factors which are to be discussed, but it is so important that it must be emphasized even though it can be largely broken down by further analysis. The business cycle, which was used as an illustration of the complexity of our institutions, is in some respects non-moral though it becomes a moral matter as soon as men resist changes which would reduce the human misery involved. In contrast we must consider as something which is positively evil the vicious circle of which the last war was but one incident. The vicious circle of defeat and revenge, of hate and fear, of militaristic nationalism met by militaristic nationalism. Perhaps in the early nineteen-twenties, as Paul Tillich suggests, there was present freedom for a fresh start for the world, freedom to break that vicious circle. If there had been more moral insight and more enlightenment and less national egoism it would have been possible to build a better international structure. But even then the scales of a long past which had taken war for granted were weighted against a right choice. With the failure to make a right decision then, the scales to-day are weighted far more heavily against a peaceful solution of the problems of Europe. I do not say that even to-day all freedom is gone but only that the margin

of freedom is narrower, and we see fear which is justified but which helps to create what is feared, a burning sense of injustice, fanatical hatred, and the unwillingness to let go superior privilege, embodied in the policies of states and the aims of powerful movements, and now with the vast rearmament programmes we see all of those attitudes embodied in the direction of the economic life of nations and growing rapidly in intensity. This illustration brings out both the determining forces in our midst which seem to be against us and also the points at which freedom and moral responsibility enter into the whole process.

SUBJECTIVE FACTORS

The pull of self-interest—the greater part of our deliberate choice of evil

This self-interest may be the personal interest of individuals or it may be the interests of the group to which one belongs, class group or national group. Self-interest distorts the judgment of whole groups and disguises itself in the form of innumerable self-deceptions. It is not, however, the only root of social evil on the subjective side, though it enters into every combination of these roots of evil in varying degrees.

Provincialism which is the result of external conditions

Some provincialism is a reflection of selfishness but provincialism is also the result of distance, of differences of language, of the lack of opportunity for contact with the favourable side of another group. The provincialism of a class or nation or race may take the form of prejudices for which there is a minimum of moral responsibility. One form of this which I have mentioned is the result of propaganda and censorship, but it may create a

generation which is not itself greatly responsible for its own provincialism.

Specialization

One of the most serious causes of social blindness is the fact that most people during their hours of work, during the hours within which their minds are freshest, must specialize upon some small segment of the world and ignore the issues on which the solution of our social problems turns. This is true of workmen who do the drudgery of the world. It is true of professional specialists. It is true of business men. It is true of housewives.

Fatigue

Along with the fact of specialization we must put the fact that after the day's work people are often too tired to be fully intelligent or sensitive or creative in their attitude towards the problems of the world. It is between these two factors—specialization and fatigue—that a large part of the evil of the world is permitted to continue. This creates both inertia and docility—which are almost equally the source of evil.

Theories which are honestly held but do not fit the facts of modern life

The social and economic theories which are honestly believed by most of our population no longer fit the facts. They still have academic prestige. They furnish most useful rationalizations for the economic interests of the more privileged groups. One person who holds and preaches the theories which justify individualism and special privileges with full honesty can salve the consciences of thousands of others who are more controlled by interest than by theory. Our capacity to rationalize our interests by convincing ourselves that our interests

coincide with the public interest is endless, and it is greatly supported by the fact that many of our rationalizations have the moral prestige which comes from being accepted by men whose honesty in believing them is beyond doubt.

The existence of convenient façades for deceiving the self and others

The theories just referred to are one form of façade which covers up the operation of selfishness and narrow groups interests. But there are many others in every country: Institutions, cherished memories, patriotic sentiments, ideals, great words used as slogans, and the sanctities of religion. All of these are used to take the evil appearance away from self-interest. In the United States those who resist the changes which are necessary for the solution of the economic problem do so in the name of the Constitution, Americanism, law and order, liberty, the system of property, without distinguishing between different forms of property which have varying degrees of moral justification. Another phase of the same process is to make oneself believe and to make others believe that the change which is opposed is Communism or something else which is equally feared. In a world of false fronts and bogeys and ideals made into misleading slogans, moral judgments become very difficult and neither the people whose intentions are most moral, nor the people who have had the background of greatest culture, are proof against being made tools of falsehood and reaction.

Neither moral character nor acute and cultured intelligence can take the place of experience of social realities. That is one reason why in order to get the social truth the perspective of those who are the victims of the present order and whose interests go against the use of the conventional façades and slogans must be

brought into the picture. They too will in time develop their own false fronts and illusions but they can puncture the conventional illusions of the moment.

Age

The fact that the minds of men harden with age unless they become fully aware of the danger and counteract it is the more serious in view of the fact that it is those who are thus hardened whom we put in a position to determine policy most frequently. The average age of those in highest positions in the Church and state and in our educational institutions is one of the sources of social inertia.

Stupidity

It is only necessary to mention the fact that there is a deal of sheer stupidity in the world. Some of it is physiological in origin and some of it comes from the dulling effects of life's routine and at times from the educational process itself. As an altogether separate factor it is best to stress the stupidity which has a physiological origin.

Inescapable limits of attention and imagination

This general fact about our finite minds is, of course, greatly aggravated by the other factors which are mentioned. It hardly needs separate discussion as it is involved in many of the things already said.

Becoming accustomed to suffering at a distance

At the present time there are many ways of making evil and suffering at a distance vivid to us. Moving pictures of the Spanish Civil War shown on American screens, dramatizations over the radio, the innumerable

magazines of pictures which have become very popular are examples of them. At the time of the great flood in the valley of the Ohio river comfortable listeners everywhere could hear over the radio day after day and night after night the actual directions which were given for the rescuing of people as the radio was used for the purpose by the local authorities. Seldom has suffering at a distance ever been made so vivid. Now it is obvious that this is good when we are able to do something about the suffering. But in cases where there is little or nothing which we can do, it is a real question whether our feelings do not become so jaded, whether the evils which become so familiar do not just become an old story and whether as a result we do not become more rather than less callous. Doubtless in this whole development is a stretching of the imagination which is indispensable for the development of right social attitudes but it does also create a serious problem.[1]

Emotional maladjustment of individuals

No one can say how far this factor enters into the complex social evils of our time, but it must be reckoned with. The emotional maladjustments of masses of obscure people who seek the kind of outlet which is provided by the excitement of war is one side of this. Also, there is the desire of people to maintain their own sense of self-importance by looking down upon other groups—especially upon racial groups in their midst. This is in part a matter of deliberate choice but it is also the result of psychic forces which are largely unconscious and beyond control. The pathology of men in power is another form which this factor takes. Doubtless it can be exaggerated in its effect and the psychic disturbances of some of

[1] I owe the realization of this problem to some suggestion by Dr. Eliot Porter.

our men of power may only fit them to be channels for the popular will in a particular social situation. But even if we give full weight to this way of explaining their power, it is difficult not to believe that their presence at the top crystallizes an evil situation and makes it more difficult to overcome it.

The caution which is the result of the unpredictability of results

One of the objective factors which was mentioned was the unpredictability of the results of any measures which we may take to deal with social evil. This on the subjective side leads to caution, conservatism, and inertia. Here again we have something which provides honest convictions on the side of the *status quo* and also rationalizations of interest which may be accepted with all degrees of honesty or dishonesty. It is difficult to exaggerate the extent to which the fear of unfamiliar patterns of life, because they are unfamiliar, quite apart from fear of personal loss, causes social conservatism. This naturally operates most strongly among those for whom the familiar is not intolerable.

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As one reviews this list of facts which cause social evil it is important to realize how closely they are related, how they are found together in the same situation in such a way that it is difficult to say where one ends and another begins. Choices for which men are morally responsible enter into combination with all of them but the degree of the moral responsibility may be small in comparison with the degree of the evil. Moreover the iniquity of past generations may have been the cause of evil which is external to us in the present and which conditions our choices now. The generation which is now coming into power is not responsible for the treaty of Versailles

and it must face the consequences of that treaty not merely as moral problems which can be dealt with by repentance, but also as political problems which require specific treatment as such. One should, however, not understress at this point the corporate character of national policies, and the necessity laid upon this generation to admit national guilt incurred by a previous generation but still charged up against the nations which won the war by the defeated powers. This generation in America which faces the race problem is not responsible for the slave trade, but it must deal with the consequences of that iniquity compounded by the consequences of its own racial arrogance and injustice. The congealed results of the wrongs committed by past generations suggest the corporate character of all social wrong, but they cannot be dealt with merely by the religious and moral change of this generation.

Extension of the sense of social sin

I began this paper by showing how difficult it is to define sin. In order not to confuse this discussion so far I have avoided the use of the word "sin." But in the writing of the last paragraph the word was much needed. That fact suggests that difficult as the word is to define, we would have even more difficulty in dispensing with it. In the concluding pages of this paper I shall use the word "sin" to refer to any form of evil which is the result of moral failure—including both deliberately chosen evil and evil which is the result of blindness which can be traced to selfishness, inertia, insensitivity. (This includes both the fourth and fifth forms of experience analysed on page 178 ff. which were found to have in common this one characteristic that both require the same cure.) I recognize still that the word "sin" in Christian usage cannot consistently be so limited

on all occasions but this much is clear; when Christians speak of sin they usually mean at least this much.

If this analysis of the causes of social evil indicates that sin is not the only cause, the purpose is not to suggest that sin is unimportant but rather to show that the other factors are important. There is a vast amount of sin at work in the present situation. There is ruthless selfishness on the part of individuals and groups, which stops at nothing to gain or maintain power or privilege. There is terrible pride of opinion which springs from a combination of sheer selfishness and fanatical idealism and which justifies any acts of cruelty towards opponents. Most people reflect with varying degrees of guilt or innocence the narrow interests of the groups to which they belong. There is the common callousness to evils which are at a distance, or have become an old story, to which everyone must confess.

It is the function of the Church to call its people to repentance. The extension of the area over which Christian people feel a genuine sense of sin is an important part of the contribution of the Church to the solution of the problems of society. But the Church can do this most effectively if it does not assume that all men are equally sinful in relation to the whole mass of corporate evil, but rather if it shows up the evil which can be traced to the doors of each one of us in such a way that henceforth we become guilty in so far as we continue to consent to it. We may have been ignorant of the real consequences of our own ways of living, of the consequences of the social policies which we have instigated, by which we have profited, for which we have voted, to which we have consented, but when our ignorance is taken away we are without excuse. Moreover it must be realized that this ignorance is not merely a simple matter of the absence of knowledge of facts but it is far more the con-

trol of our minds by prejudices and patterns of thinking and feeling which cover up the real meaning of the facts.

In addition to the increase of actual moral responsibility through opening the eyes of men to evil which is connected with their lives, it is important to develop the inner attitude which fits the actual situation in connection with all social evil. Each of the types of experience, except the first—religious humility—described in the first part of this paper, has its own appropriate inner attitude corresponding to it.

Religious humility is itself an inner attitude which must accompany all of our conduct, which must put a question mark beside our whole life, beside our loyalties and ideals, social systems and personal decisions. In this way it not only helps us to overcome self-righteousness but also makes us sensitive to the traces of evil in the best we do and in the very standards which we apply to our social institutions.

Our attitude in the face of external evils which are beyond our control, which force us to compromise, should be a moral restlessness and tension rather than the sense of guilt. We cannot accept compromises with complacency even though we may believe that in a particular case they represent the best possible step and therefore the demand which is made upon us by God in the situation. But to assimilate with discrimination this moral restlessness to the sense of guilt which we feel in the face of evil for which we are morally responsible is to cause the sense of guilt to have an attenuated meaning, or it is to bring upon the soul, caught in situations beyond its control, morbid self-accusation.

Evil which is the result of our ignorance, which is unavoidable at the time, must create in us a sharp sense of moral responsibility directed toward the future as soon as that ignorance is overcome.

The sense of guilt begins in the case of evil which is the result of ignorance traceable to our own moral blindness and becomes most acute when evil is the result of our deliberate fault. In both cases, something deep within us must be changed, and when we have deliberately chosen courses which we know to be socially destructive we need nothing less than a moral conversion. The sense of guilt which goes with such a consciousness of moral responsibility leaves scars which only divine forgiveness can heal. In all these delicate distinctions between degrees of responsibility we must be more rigorous in judging ourselves than in judging others. That is both wise pedagogy and Christian charity.

CONCLUSION

There are at least three consequences which follow from this kind of discussion.

1. We should see quite clearly the necessity for a multiple attack upon social evil. All religious and moral simplifications of social strategy appear inadequate. Theology can make a clearer place for political action, for all manner of specific techniques for dealing with specific problems, for everything which can be done by teaching to overcome ignorance, to remove blind spots, to stretch the imaginations of men. Organized social action takes its place along with the changing of the motive of individuals.

2. This kind of approach to the problem makes it more natural to be fair to people, to understand the reasons for their conduct, and to avoid that kind of blanket condemnation in terms of sin which must necessarily put them on the defensive and make it more difficult to open their eyes to the consequences of the things which they do or permit.

3. We should be able to recognize the permanent limitations in human nature. Both the finiteness and the sin of men make it impossible to expect the realization of a human utopia on earth. Thus the tension between the transcendent will of God and every actual historical situation is preserved, and we avoid the danger of identifying any particular programme or social order with the absolute.

4. This kind of analysis enables us to do justice to the stubbornness of evil in the human situation without blinding ourselves to the good in human nature. It becomes clearer how men can do evil on a vast scale in society and still in their personal lives, where issues re simpler and where imagination is active, show honesty, loyalty, and compassion. There can be fine strains in their motives even in relation to public policies which have evil consequences. Any sour view of human nature, any tendency to overlook the beauty and the nobility of countless persons, is terribly wrong. We must be able to understand why it is that human life contains so vast a contradiction as it does—devastating evil on the one side and on the other love and integrity and self-giving devotion in human hearts. Such a view as I have suggested indicates how it is possible that human nature caught in an evil situation, is still the fitting medium for the revelation of the divine.

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